



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

3 3433 07480045 3

ST
A FIFE FISHER

AMELIA · E · B

Fiction, American



NR



CHRISTINE

By AMELIA E. BARR

Christine

Joan

Profit and Loss

Three Score and Ten

The Measure of a Man

The Winning of Lucia

Playing with Fire

All the Days of My Life

D. APPLETON & COMPANY
Publishers New York

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
ACADEMY LIBRARY



When she came to the top of the cliff, she turned and
gazed again at the sea.

[PAGE 6]

CHRISTINE

A FIFE FISHER GIRL

BY

AMELIA E. ^{de}BARR

AUTHOR OF "JOAN," "PROFIT AND LOSS," "THE MEASURE OF A MAN,"

"ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE," ETC.



FRONTISPIECE BY

STOCKTON MULFORD

"The sea is His, and He made it"

LC

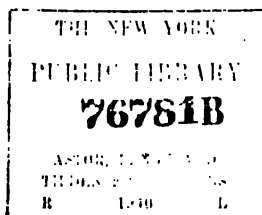
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

LONDON

1917

ME5



COPYRIGHT, 1917, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
ACADEMY LIBRARY

Printed in the United States of America

AUG 23 1917

F

I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK TO
RUTGER BLEECKER JEWETT

BECAUSE HE IS MY FRIEND, AND
EXPRESSES ALL THAT JEWEL OF A
MONOSYLLABLE REQUIRES AND
BECAUSE, THOUGH A LANDS-
MAN, HE LOVES THE SEA AND
IN HIS DREAMS, HE IS A SAILOR.

AMELIA E. BARR.

January 7th, 1917.

11

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. FISHERS OF CULRAINE	1
II. CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE	23
III. ANGUS BALLISTER	38
IV. THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR	61
V. CHRISTINE AND ANGUS	86
VI. A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING .	115
VII. NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD	152
VIII. AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE	183
IX. A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING	212
X. ROBERTA INTERFERES	247
XI. CHRISTINE MISTRESS OF RULESON COT- TAGE	280
XII. NEIL'S RETURN HOME	306
XIII. THE RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME .	339
XIV. AFTER MANY YEARS	362

CHRISTINE

CHAPTER I

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

The hollow oak our palace is
Our heritage the sea.

Howe'er it be it seems to me
'Tis only noble to be good.
Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood.

FRIENDS, who have wandered with me through England, and Scotland, and old New York, come now to Fife, and I will tell you the story of Christina Ruleson, who lived in the little fishing village of Culraine, seventy years ago. You will not find Culraine on the map, though it is one of that chain of wonderful little towns and villages which crown, as with a diadem, the fore-front and the sea-front of the ancient kingdom of Fife. Most of these towns have some song or story, with which they glorify themselves, but Culraine—hidden in the clefts of her sea-girt rocks—

CHRISTINE

was *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Her people lived between the sea and the sky, between their hard lives on the sea, and their glorious hopes of a land where there would be "no more sea."

Seventy years ago every man in Culrairie was a fisherman, a mighty, modest, blue-eyed Goliath, with a serious, inscrutable face; naturally a silent man, and instinctively a very courteous one. He was exactly like his great-grandfathers, he had the same fishing ground, the same phenomena of tides and winds, the same boat of rude construction, and the same implements for its management. His modes of thought were just as stationary. It took the majesty of the Free Kirk Movement, and its host of self-sacrificing clergy, to rouse again that passion of religious faith, which made him the most thorough and determined of the followers of John Knox.

The women of these fishermen were in many respects totally unlike the men. They had a character of their own, and they occupied a far more prominent position in the village than the men did. They were the agents through whom all sales were effected, and all the money passed through their hands. They were talkative, assertive, bustling, and a marked contrast to their gravely silent husbands.

The Fife fisherman dresses very much like a sailor—though he never looks like one—but the fisher-wife had then a distinctly foreign look.



FISHERS OF CULRAINE

delighted in the widest stripes, and the brightest colors. Flaunting calicoes and many-colored kerchiefs were her steady fashion. Her petticoats were very short, her feet trigly shod, and while unmarried she wore a most picturesque headdress of white muslin or linen, set a little backward over her always luxuriant hair. Even in her girlhood she was the epitome of power and self-reliance, and the husband who could prevent her in womanhood from making the bargains and handling the money, must have been an extraordinarily clever man.

I find that in representing a certain class of humanity, I have accurately described, mentally and physically, the father and mother of my heroine; and it is only necessary to say further that James Ruleson was a sternly devout man. He trusted God heartily at all hazards, and submitted himself and all he loved to the Will of God, with that complete self-abnegation which is perhaps one of the best fruits of a passionate Calvinism.

For a fisherman he was doubtless well-provided, but no one but his wife, Margot Ruleson, knew the exact sum of money lying to his credit in the Bank of Scotland; and Margot kept such knowledge strictly private. Ruleson owned his boat, and his cottage, and both were a little better and larger than the ordinary boat and cottage; while Margot was a woman who could turn a penny ten times over better than any other woman in the cottages of Culraine. Ruleson also had been blessed with

CHRISTINE

six sons and one daughter, and with the exception of the youngest, all the lads had served their time in their father's boat, and even the one daughter was not excused a single duty that a fisher-girl ought to do.

Culraine was not a pretty village, though its cottages were all alike whitewashed outside, and roofed with heather. They had but two rooms generally—a but and a ben, with no passage between. The majority were among the sand hills, but many were built on the lofty, sea-lashed rocks. James Rule-son's stood on a wide shelf, too high up for the highest waves, though they often washed away the wall of the garden, where it touched the sandy shore.

The house stood by itself. It had its own sea, and its own sky, and its own garden, the latter sloping in narrow, giddy paths to the very beach. Sure feet were needed among its vegetables, and its thickets of gooseberry and currant bushes, and its straying tangles of blackberry vines. Round the whole plot there was a low stone wall, covered with wall-flowers, wild thyme, rosemary, and house-leek.

A few beds around the house held roses and lilies, and other floral treasures, but these were so exclusively Margot's property, and Margot's adoration, that I do not think she would like me even to writ about them. Sometimes she put a rosebud in t' buttonhole of her husband's Sunday coat, and sorr

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

times Christina had a similar favor, but Margot was intimate with her flowers. She knew every one by a special name, and she counted them every morning. It really hurt her to cut short their beautiful lives, and her eldest son Norman, after long experience said: "If Mither cuts a flower, she'll ill to live wi'. I wouldna tine her good temper for a bit rosebud. It's a poor bargain."

One afternoon, early in the June of 1849, Christine Ruleson walked slowly up the narrow, flowery path of this mountain garden. She was heard before she was seen, for she was singing an east coast ballad, telling all the world around her, that she

—Cast her line in Largo bay,
And fishes she caught nine;
Three to boil, and three to fry,
And three to bait the line.

So much she sang, and then she turned to the sea. The boat of a solitary fisherman, and a lustrously white bird, were lying quietly on the bay, close together, and a large ship with all her sails set was dropping lazily along to the south. For a few moments she watched them, and then continued her song.

She was tall and lovely, and browned and bloomed in the fresh salt winds. Her hair had been lossened by the breeze, and had partially escaped from her cap. She had a broad, white brow, and the dark blue eyes that dwelt beneath it were full of soul—

CHRISTINE

not a cloud in them, only a soft, radiant light, shaded by eyelids deeply fringed, and almost transparent—eyelids that were eloquent—full of secrets. Her mouth was beautiful, her lips made for loving words—even little children wanted to kiss her. And she lived the very life of the sea. Like it she was subject to ebb and flow. Her love for it was perhaps prenatal, it might even have driven her into her present incarnation.

When she came to the top of the cliff, she turned and gazed again at the sea. The sunshine then fell all over her, and her dress came into notice. It was simple enough, yet very effective—a white fluted cap, lying well back on her bright, rippling hair, long gold rings in her ears, and a vivid scarlet kerchief over her shoulders. Her skirt was of wide blue and gray stripes, but it was hardly noticeable, for whoever looked in Christine's face cared little about her dress. He could never tell what she wore.

As she stood in the sunshine, a young man ran out of the house to meet her—a passing handsome youth, with his heart in his eager face and outstretched hands.

"Christine! Christine!" he cried. "Where a' have you keepit yourself? I hae been watchin' and waiting for you, these three hours past."

"Cluny! You are crushing the bonnie flower my hands, and I'm no thanking you for that."

"And my puir heart! It is atween your

c

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

hands, and it's crushing it you are, day after day. Christine, it is most broke wi' the cruel grip o' longing and loving—and not a word o' hope or love to help it haud together."

"You should learn seasonable times, Cluny. It's few lasses that can be bothered wi' lovers that come sae early. Women folk hae their hands full o' wark o' some kind, then."

"Ay, full o' flowers. They canna even find time to gie the grip o' their hand to the lad that loves them, maist to the death throe."

"I'm not wanting any lad to love me to the death throe, and I'm not believing them, when they talk such-like nonsense. No indeed! The lad I love must be full o' life and *forthput*. He must be able to guide his boat, and throw and draw his nets single-handed—if needs be."

"I love you so! I love you so! I can do nothing else, Christine!"

"*Havers!* Love sweetens life, but it's a long way from being life itsel'. Many a man, and many a woman, loses their love, but they dinna fling their life awa' because o' that misfortune—unless they have no kindred to love, and no God to fear."

"You can't tell how it is, Christine. You never were i' love, I'm thinking."

"I'm thankfu' to say I never was; and from all I see, and hear, I am led to believe that being in love isna a superior state o' life. I'm just hoping that what you ca' love isna of a catching quality."

CHRISTINE

"I wish it was! Maybe then, you might catch love from me. Oh Christine, give me a hope, dear lass. I canna face life without it. 'Deed I can not."

"I might do such a thing. Whiles women-folk are left to themsel's, and then it goes ill wi' them;" and she sighed and shook her head, as if she feared such a possibility was within her own fate.

"What is it you mean? I'm seeking one word o' kindness from you, Christine."

Then she looked at him, and she did not require speech. Cluny dared to draw closer to her—to put his arm round her waist—to whisper such alluring words of love and promise, that she smiled and gave him a flower, and finally thought she might—perhaps—sometime—learn the lesson he would teach her, for, "This warld is fu' o' maybe's, Cluny," she said, "and what's the good o' being young, if we dinna expect miracles?"

"I'm looking for no miracle, Christine. I'm asking for what a man may win by a woman's favor. I hae loved you, Christine, since I was a bit laddie o' seven years auld. I'll love you till men carry me to the kirk yard. I'd die for your love. I'd live, and suffer a' things for it. Lassie! Dear, dear lassie, dinna fling love like mine awa'. There's every gude in it."

She felt his heart throbbing in his words, but ere she could answer them, her brother Neil called her three times, in a voice that admitted of no delay. "Good-by, Cluny!" she said hurriedly. "You

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

ken Neil isna to be put off." Then she was gone, and Cluny, full of bewildered loving and anxious feelings, rushed at headlong speed down the steep and narrow garden path, to his grandmother's cottage on the sands.

Neil stood by a little pine table covered with books and papers. He was nearly twenty-one years old, and compared with his family was small in stature, lightly built, and dark in complexion. His hair was black, his eyes somberly gray, and full of calculation. His nose, lean and sharp, indicated selfish adherence to the realities of life, and the narrow nostrils positively accused him of timidity and caution. His mouth was firm and discreet. Taken as a whole, his face was handsome, though lean and thoughtful; but his manner was less pleasant. It was that of a serious snob, who thinks there is a destiny before him. He had been petted and spoiled all his life long, and his speech and conduct were full of the unpleasant survivals of this treatment. It spoiled him, and grated on Christine's temperament, like grit in a fine salad.

He had never made a shilling in his life, he was the gentleman of the family, elected by the family to that position. In his boyhood he had been delicate, and quite unfit for the rough labor of the boats, but as he had developed an extraordinary love for books and learning, the minister had advised his dedication to the service of either the Law or the Gospel. To this proposal the whole household

CHRISTINE

cheerfully, even proudly, agreed. To have an educated man among the Rulesons pleased everyone. They spoke together of the great Scotch chancellors, and the great Scotch clergy, and looked upon Neil Ruleson, by special choice and election, as destined in the future to stand high among Scotland's clergy or Scotland's lawyers.

For this end, during eleven years, all had given their share without stint or holdback. That Neil had finally chosen to become a Lord of the Law, and to sit on the Bench, rather than stand in the Pulpit, was a great disappointment to his father, who had stubbornly hoped his son would get the call no man can innocently refuse to answer. His mother and brothers were satisfied. Norman Ruleson had once seen the Lords ride in civic pomp and splendid attire to Edinburgh Parliament House, and he was never weary of describing the majesty of the judges in their wigs and gowns, and the ceremonies that attended every step of the administration of justice.

"And the big salary coming to the judges!" Norman always added—"the salary, and the visible honors arena to be lightlied, or made little o'. Compared wi' a minister's stipend, a judge's salary is stin-pen-dous! And they go wi' the best i' the land, and it isna anything o' a wonder, when a judge is made a lord. There was Lord Chancellor Campbell, born in Fife itsel', in the vera county town o' Cupar. I have seen the house next the Bell Inn

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

where he was born, and his feyther was the minister o' Cupar. About the year 18——"

"You needna fash either us, or yoursel', Norman, wi' names and dates; it will be time in plenty, when you can add our lad to the list."

Margot at this hour was inclined to side with her husband. Margot believed in realities. She saw continually the honorable condition of the Scotch clergy; Norman's story about the royal state and power of the judges was like something read out of a book. However, now that Neil was in his last year of study, and looking forward to the certificate which would place him among men in such a desirable condition, she would not darken his hopes, nor damp his ardor.

Neil's classes in the Maraschal college at Aberdeen were just closed, but he was very busy preparing papers for their opening in September. This was to be his final term, and he expected to deliver a valedictory speech. The table in the best room, which he was permitted to occupy as a study, was covered with notes, which he wished copied—with books from which he was anxious to recite—with work of many kinds, which was waiting for Christine's clear brain and fine penmanship.

It had been waiting an hour and Neil was distinctly angry.

"Mother! Where at all is Christine?" he asked.

"She went to your brither Norman's cottage. His little lad isna as weel as he should be."

CHRISTINE

"And my wark has to wait on a sick bairn. I'm not liking it. And I have no doubt she is wasting my time with Cluny McPherson—no doubt at all."

"Weel! That circumstance isna likely to be far out o' the way."

"It is very far out of *my* way. I can tell you that, Mother."

"Weel, lad, there's no way always straight. It's right and left, and up and down, wi' every way o' life."

"That is so, Mother, but my work is waiting, and it puts me out of the right way, entirely!"

"Tut! tut! What are you complaining about? The lassie has been at your beck and call the best pairt o' her life. And it's vera seldom she can please you. If she gave you the whites o' her e'en, you would still hae a grumble. It's Saturday afternoon. What's your will sae late i' the week's wark?"

"Ought I not to be at my studies, late and early?"

"That stands to reason."

"Well then, I want Christine's help, and I am going to call her."

"You hae had her help ever sin' you learned your A B C's. She's twa years younger than you are, but she's twa years ahead o' you in the ordinary essentials. Do you think I didna tak' notice that when she was hearing your tasks, she learned them the while you were stumbling all the way through

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

them. Dod! The lassie knew things if she only looked in the face o' them twice o'er, and it took you mair than an hour to get up to her—what you ca' history, and ge-o-graph-y she learned as if they were just a bairn's bit rhyming, and she was as quick wi' the slate and figures as you were slow. Are you forgetting things like these?"

"It is not kind in you to be reminding me of them, Mother. It is not like you."

"One o' my duties to a' my men-folk, is to keep them in mind o' the little bits o' kindness they are apt to forget. Your feyther isna to mind, he ne'er misses the least o' them. Your brother Norman is like him, the rest o' you arena to lippen to—at a' times."

"I think I have helped Christine as much as she has helped me. She knows that, she has often said so."

"I'll warrant! It was womanlike! She said it to mak' ye feel comfortable, when you o'erworked her. Did ye ever say the like to her?"

"I am going to call her. She is better with me than with Cluny Macpherson—that I am sure of."

"You and her for it. Settle the matter as it suits ye, but I can tell ye, I hae been perfectly annoyed, on several occasions, wi' your clear selfishness—and that is the vera outcome o' all my thoughts on this subject."

Then Neil went to the door, and called Christine thrice, and the power of long habit was ill to re-

CHRISTINE

strain, so she left her lover hurriedly and went to him.

"I have been watching and waiting—waiting for you, Christine, the last three hours."

"Tak' tent o' what you say, Neil. It isna twa hours yet, since we had dinner."

"You should have told me that you were intending to fritter and fool your afternoon away."

"My mither bid me go and speir after Norman's little laddie. He had a sair cold and fever, and——"

"Sit down. Are your hands clean? I want you to copy a very important paper."

"What about?"

"Differences in the English and Scotch Law."

"I don't want to hae anything to do wi' the Law. I canna understand it, and I'm no wanting to understand it."

"It is not necessary that you should understand it, but you know what a peculiar writing comes from my pen. I can manage Latin or Greek, but I cannot write plainly the usual English. Now, you write a clear, firm hand, and I want you to copy my important papers. I believe I have lost honors at college, just through my singular writing."

"I wouldn't wonder. It is mair like the marks the robin's wee feet make on the snow, than the writing o' human hands. I wonder, too, if the robin kens his ain footmarks, and if they mean anything to him. Maybe they say, 'It's vera cold this morning—and the ground is covered wi' snow—and

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

I'm vera hungry—hae ye anything for me this morning?' The sma footmarks o' the wee birds might mean all o' this, and mair too, Neil."

"What nonsense you are talking! Run away and wash your hands. They are stained and soiled with something."

"Wi' the wild thyme, and the rosemary, and the wall-flowers."

"And the rough, tarry hand of Cluny Macpherson. Be quick! I am in a hurry."

"It is Saturday afternoon, Neil. Feyther and Eneas will be up from the boats anon. I dinna care to write for you, the now. Mither said I was to please mysel' what I did, and I'm in the mind to go and see Faith Balcarry, and hae a long crack wi' her."

Neil looked at her in astonishment. There was a stubborn set to her lovely mouth, he had never seen there before. It was a feminine variety of an expression he understood well when he saw it on his father's lips. Immediately he changed his tactics.

"Your eyes look luck on anything you write, Christine, and you know how important these last papers are to me—and to all of us."

"Wouldna Monday suit them, just as weel?"

"No. There will be others for Monday. I am trusting to you, Christine. You always have helped me. You are my Fail-Me-Never!"

She blushed and smiled with the pleasure this ac-

CHRISTINE

knowledgment gave her, but she did not relinquish her position. "I am vera sorry, Neil," she answered, "but I dinna see how I can break my promise to Faith Balcarry. You ken weel what a friendless creature she is in this world. How could I disappoint a lass whose cup is running o'er wi' sorrow?"

"I will make a bargain with you, Christine. I will wait until Monday, if you will promise me to keep Cluny Macpherson in his place. He has no business making love to you, and I will make trouble for him if he does so."

"What ails you at Cluny? He is in feyther's boat, and like to stay there. Feyther trusts him, and Eneas never has a word out o' the way with him, and you ken that Eneas is often gey ill to wark wi', and vera demanding."

"Cluny Macpherson is all right in the boat, but he is much out of his place holding your two hands, and making love to you. I saw him doing it, not ten minutes ago."

"Cluny has made love to me a' his life lang. There is nae harm in his love."

"There is no good in it. Just as soon as I am one of Her Majesty's Councilors at Law, I shall take an office in the town, and rent a small floor, and then I shall require you to keep house for me."

"You are running before you can creep, Neil. How are you going to pay rents, and buy furnishings? Forbye, I couldna leave Mither her lane. She hasna been hersel' this year past, and whiles

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

she has sair attacks that gie us all a fearsome day or twa."

"Mither has had those attacks for years."

"All the more reason for us to be feared o' them. Neil, I canna even think o' my life, wanting Mither."

"But you love *me*! I am bound to bring all kinds o' good luck to our family."

"Mither is good luck hersel'. There would be nae luck about the house, if Mither went awa'."

"Well then, you will give Cluny up?"

"I canna say that I will do anything o' that kind. Every lass wants a lover, and I have nane but Cluny."

"I have a grand one in view for you."

"Wha may the lad be?"

"My friend at the Maraschal. He is the young Master of Brewster and Ballister, and as fine a young fellow as walks in shoe leather. The old Ballister mansion you must have seen every Sabbath, as you went to the kirk."

"Ay, I hae seen the roof and turrets o' it, among the thick woods; but naebody has lived there, since I was born."

"You are right, but Ballister is going to open the place, and spend gold in its plenishing and furnishing. It is a grand estate, and the young master is worthy of it. I am his friend, and I mean to bring you two together. You are bonnie, and he is rich; it would be a proper match. I owe you something,

CHRISTINE

Christine, and I'll pay my debt with a husband worthy of you."

"And how would I be worthy o' him? I hae neither learning nor siller. You are talking foolishness, Neil."

"You are not without learning. In my company you must have picked up much information. You could not hear my lessons and copy my exercises without acquiring a knowledge of many things."

"Ay, a smattering o' this and that. You wouldna call that an education, would you?"

"It is a better one than most girls get, that is, in the verities and the essentials. The overcome is only in the ornamentals, or accomplishments—piano-playing, singing, dancing, and maybe what you call a smattering of the French tongue. There is a piano in Ballister, and you would pick out a Scotch song in no time, for you sing live a mavis. As for dancing, you foot it like a fairy, and a mouthful of French words would be at your own desire or pleasure."

"I hae that mouthfu' already. Did you think I wrote book after book full o' your French exercises, and heard you recite Ollendorf twice through, and learned naething while I was doing it? Neil, I am awa' to Faith, I canna possibly break my word to a lass in trouble."

"A moment, Christina——"

"I havna half a moment. I'll do your writing Monday, Neil."

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

"Christine! Christine!"

She was beyond his call, and before he got over his amazement, she was out of sight. Then his first impulse was to go to his mother, but he remembered that she had not been sympathetic when he had before spoken of Christine and Cluny Macpherson.

"I will be wise, and take my own counsel," he thought, and he had no fear of wanting his own sympathy; yet when he reviewed his conversation with Christine, he was annoyed at its freedom.

"I ought not to have told her about Ballister," he thought, "she will be watching for him at the kirk, and looking at the towers o' Ballister House as if they were her own. And whatever made me say I thought of her as my housekeeper? She would be the most imprudent person. I would have the whole fishing-village at my house door, and very likely at my fireside; and that would be a constant set-down for me."

This train of thought was capable of much discreet consideration, and he pursued it until he heard the stir of presence and conversation in the large living room. Then he knew that his father and brother were at home, to keep the preparation for the Sabbath. So he made himself look as lawyer-like as possible, and joined the family. Everyone, and everything, had a semi-Sabbath look. Ruleson was in a blue flannel suit, so was Eneas, and Margot had put on a clean cap, and thrown over her shoul-

CHRISTINE

ders a small tartan shawl. The hearth had been rid up, and the table was covered with a clean white cloth. In the oven the meat and pudding were cooking, and there was a not unpleasant sancta-serious air about the people, and the room. You might have fancied that even the fishing nets hanging against the wall knew it was Saturday night, and no fishing on hand.

Christine was not there. And as it was only on Saturday and Sunday nights that James Ruleson could be the priest of his family, these occasions were precious to him, and he was troubled if any of his family were absent. Half an hour before Christine returned home, he was worrying lest she forget the household rite, and when she came in he asked her, for the future, to bide at home on Saturday and Sabbath nights, saying he "didna feel all right," unless she was present.

"I was doing your will, Feyther, anent Faith Balcarry."

"Then you were doing right. How is the puir lassie?"

"There's little to be done for her. She hasna a hope left, and when I spoke to her anent heaven, she said she knew nobody there, and the thought o' the loneliness she would feel frightened her."

"You see, James," said Margot, "puir Faith never saw her father or mother, and if all accounts be true, no great loss, and I dinna believe the lassie ever knew anyone in this warld she would want to see in

FISHERS OF CULRAINE

heaven. Nae wonder she is sae sad and lonely."

"There is the great multitude of saints there."

"Gudeman, it is our ain folk we will be seeking, and speiring after, in heaven. Without them, we shall be as lonely as puir Faith, who knows no one either in this world, or the next, that she's caring to see. I wouldn't wonder, James, if heaven might not feel lonely to those who win there, but find no one they know to welcome them."

"We are told we shall be satisfied, Margot."

"I'm sure I hope sae! Come now, and we will hae a gude dinner and eat it cheerfully."

After dinner there was a pleasant evening during which fishers and fishers' wives came in, and chatted of the sea, and the boats, and the herring fishing just at hand; but at ten o'clock the big Bible, bound round with brass, covered with green baize, and undivested of the Books of the Apocrypha, was laid before the master. As he was trying to find the place he wanted, Margot stepped behind him, and looked over his shoulder:

"Gudeman," she said softly, "you needna be harmering through thae chapters o' proper names, in the Book o' Chronicles. The trouble is overganging the profit. Read us one o' King David's psalms or canticles, then we'll go to our sleep wi' a song in our hearts."

"Your will be it, Margot. Hae you any choice?"

"I was reading the seventy-first this afternoon, and I could gladly hear it o'er again."

CHRISTINE

And O how blessed is that sleep into which we fall, hearing through the darkness and silence, the happy soul recalling itself—"In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust—Thou art my hope, O Lord God—my trust from my youth—I will hope continually—and praise Thee—more and more—my soul which Thou hast—redeemed! Which Thou hast redeemed!" With that wonderful thought falling off into deep, sweet sleep—it might be into that mysteriously conscious sleep, informed by prophesying dreams, which is the walking of God through sleep.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

I remember the black wharves and the boats,
And the sea tides tossing free;
And the fishermen with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.

The Domine is a good man. If you only meet him on the street, and he speaks to you, you go for the rest of the day with your head up.

ONE day leads to another, and even in the little, hidden-away village of Culraine, no two days were exactly alike. Everyone was indeed preparing for the great fishing season, and looking anxiously for its arrival, but if all were looking for the same event, it had for its outcome in every heart a different end, or desire. Thus, James Ruleson hoped its earnings would complete the sum required to build a cottage for his daughter's marriage portion, and Margot wanted the money, though not for the same object. Norman had a big doctor's bill to pay, and Eneas thought of a two weeks' holiday, and a trip to Edinburgh and Glasgow; while Neil was anxious about an in-

CHRISTINE

crease in his allowance. He had his plea all ready—he wanted a new student's gown of scarlet flannel, and some law books, which, he said, everyone knew were double the price of any other books. It was his last session, and he did hope that he would be let finish it creditably.

He talked to Christine constantly on the subject, and she promised to stand up for the increase. "Though you ken, Neil," she added, "that you hae had full thirty pounds a session, and that is a lot for feyther to tak' out o' the sea; forbye Mither was aye sending you a box full o' eggs and bacon, and fish and oatmeal, ne'er forgetting the cake that men-folk all seem sae extra fond o'. And you yoursel' were often speaking o' the lads who paid their fees and found their living out o' thirty pounds a session. Isn't that sae?"

"I do not deny the fact, but let me tell you how they manage it. They have a breakfast of porridge and milk, and then they are away for four hours' Greek and Latin. Then they have two pennyworths of haddock and a few potatoes for dinner, and back to the college again, for more dead languages, and mathematics. They come back to their bit room in some poor, cold house, and if they can manage it, have a cup of tea and some oat cake, and they spend their evenings learning their lessons for the next day, by the light of a tallow candle."

"They are brave, good lads, and I dinna wonder they win all, an' mair, than what they worked for.

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

The lads o' Maraschal College are fine scholars, and the vera pith o' men. The hard wark and the frugality are good for them, and, Neil, we are expecting you to be head and front among them."

"Then I must have the books to help me there."

"That stands to reason; and if you'll gie me your auld gown, I'll buy some flannel, and mak' you a new one, just like it."

"The college has its own tailor, Christine. I believe the gowns are difficult to make. And what is more, I shall be obligated to have a new kirk suit. You see I go out with Ballister a good deal—very best families and all that—and I must have the clothes conforming to the company. Ballister might—nae doubt would—lend me the money—but——"

"What are you talking anent? Borrowing is sorrowing, aye and shaming, likewise. I'm fairly astonished at you naming such a thing! If you are put to a shift like that, Christine can let you hae the price o' a suit o' clothing."

"O Christine, if you would do that, it would be a great favor, and a great help to me. I'll pay you back, out of the first money I make. The price o' the books I shall have to coax from Mother."

"You'll hae no obligation to trouble Mother. Ask your feyther for the books you want. He would be the vera last to grudge them to you. Speak to him straight, and bold, and you'll get the siller wi' a smile and a good word."

CHRISTINE

"If *you* would ask him for me."

"I will not!"

"Yes, you will, Christine. I have reasons for not doing so."

"You hae just one reason—simple cowardice. O Man! If you are a coward anent asking a new suit o' clothes for yoursel', what kind o' a lawyer will you mak' for ither folk?"

"You know how Father is about giving money."

"Ay, Feyther earns his money wi' his life in his hands. He wants to be sure the thing sought is good and necessary. Feyther's right. Now my money was maistly gi'en me, I can mair easily risk it."

"There is no risk in my promise to pay."

"You havna any sure contract wi' Good Fortune, Neil, and it will be good and bad wi' you, as it is wi' ither folk."

"I do not approve of your remarks, Christine. When people are talking of the fundamentals—and surely money is one of them—they ought to avoid irritating words."

"You'll mak' an extraordinary lawyer, if you do that, but I'm no sure that you will win your case, wanting them. I thought they were sort o' necessitated; but crooked and straight is the law, and it is well known that what it calls truth today, may be far from truth tomorrow."

"What ails you today, Christine? Has the law injured you in any way?"

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

"Ay, it played us a' a trick. When you took up the books, and went to the big school i' the toun to prepare for Aberdeen, we all o' us thought it was King's College you were bound for, and then when you were ready for Aberdeen, you turned your back on King's College, and went to the Maraschal."

"King's College is for the theology students. The Maraschal is the law school."

"I knew that. We a' know it. The Maraschal spelt a big disappointment to feyther and mysel'."

"I have some work to finish, Christine, and I will be under an obligation if you will leave me now. You are in an upsetting temper, and I think you have fairly forgotten yourself."

"Well I'm awa, but mind you! When the fishing is on, I canna be at your bidding. I'm telling you!"

"Just so."

"I'll hae no time for you, and your writing. I'll be helping Mither wi' the fish, from the dawn to the dark."

"Would you do that?"

"Would I not?"

She was at the open door of the room as she spoke, and Neil said with provoking indifference: "If you are seeing Father, you might speak to him anent the books I am needing."

"I'll not do it! What are you feared for? You're perfectly unreasonable, perfectly ridic-lus!"

CHRISTINE

And she emphasized her assertions by her decided manner of closing the door.

On going into the yard, she found her father standing there, and he was looking gravely over the sea. "Feyther!" she said, and he drew her close to his side, and looked into her lovely face with a smile.

"Are you watching for the fish, Feyther?"

"Ay, I am! They are long in coming this year."

"Every year they are long in coming. Perhaps we are impatient."

"Just sae. We are a' ready for them—watching for them—Cluny went to Cupar Head to watch. He has a fine sea-sight. If they are within human ken, he will spot them, nae doubt. What hae you been doing a' the day lang?"

"I hae been writing for Neil. He is uncommon anxious about this session, Feyther."

"He ought to be."

"He is requiring some expensive books, and he is feared to name them to you; he thinks you hae been sae liberal wi' him already—if I was you, Feyther, I would be asking him—quietly when you were by your twa sel's—if he was requiring anything i' the way o' books."

"He has had a big sum for that purpose already, Christine."

"I know it, Feyther, but I'm not needing to tell you that a man must hae the tools his wark is requiring, or he canna do it. If you set Neil to mak'

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

a table, you'd hae to gie him the saw, and the hammer, and the full wherewithals, for the makin' o' a table; and when you are for putting him among the Edinbro' Law Lords, you'll hae to gie him the books that can teach him their secrets. Isn't that fair, Feyther?"

"I'm not denying it."

"Weel then, you'll do the fatherly thing, and seeing the laddie is feared to ask you for the books, you'll ask him, 'Are you wanting any books for the finishing up, Neil?' You see it is just here, Feyther, he could borrow the books——"

"Hang borrowing!"

"Just sae, you are quite right, Feyther. Neil says if he has to borrow, he'll never get the book when he wants it, and that he would never get leave to keep it as long as he needed. Now Neil be to hae his ain books, Feyther, he will mak' good use o' them, and we must not fail him at the last hour."

"Wha's talking o' failing him? Not his feyther, I'm sure! Do I expect to catch herrings without the nets and accessories? And I ken that I'll not mak' a lawyer o' Neil, without the Maraschal and the books it calls for."

"You are the wisest and lovingest o' feythers. When you meet Neil, and you twa are by yoursel's, put your hand on Neil's shoulder, and ask Neil, 'Are you needing any books for your last lessons?' "

"I'll do as you say, dear lass. It is right I should."

CHRISTINE

"Nay, but he should ask you to do it. If it was mysel', I could ask you for anything I ought to have, but Neil is vera shy, and he kens weel how hard you wark for your money. He canna bear to speak o' his necessities, sae I'm speaking the word for him."

"Thy word goes wi' me—always. I'll ne'er say nay to thy yea," and he clasped her hand, and looked with a splendid smile of affection into her beautiful face. An English father would have certainly kissed her, but Scotch fathers rarely give this token of affection. Christine did not expect it, unless it was her birthday, or New Year's morning.

It was near the middle of July, when the herring arrived. Then early one day, Ruleson, watching the sea, smote his hands triumphantly, and lifting his cap with a shout of welcome, cried—

"There's our boat! Cluny is sailing her! He's bringing the news! They hae found the fish! Come awa' to the pier to meet them, Christine."

With hurrying steps they took the easier landward side of descent, but when they reached the pier there was already a crowd of men and women there, and the *Sea Gull*, James Ruleson's boat, was making for it. She came in close-hauled to the wind, with a double reef in her sail. She came rushing across the bay, with the water splashing her gunwale. Christine kept her eyes upon the lad at the tiller, a handsome lad, tanned to the temples. His cheeks were flushed, and the wind was in his hair,

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

and the sunlight in his eyes, and he was steering the big herring boat into the harbor.

The men were soon staggering down to the boats with the nets, coiling them up in apparently endless fashion, and as they were loaded they were very hard to get into the boats, and harder still to get out. Just as the sun began to set, the oars were dipped, and the boats swept out of the harbor into the bay, and there they set their red-barked sails, and stood out for the open sea.

Ruleson's boat led the way, because it was Ruleson's boat that had found the fish, and Christine stood at the pier-edge cheering her strong, brave father, and not forgetting a smile and a wave of her hand for the handsome Cluny at the tiller. To her these two represented the very topmost types of brave and honorable humanity. The herring they were seeking were easily found, for it was the Grand Shoal, and it altered the very look of the ocean, as it drove the water before it in a kind of flushing ripple. Once, as the boats approached them, the shoal sank for at least ten minutes, and then rose in a body again, reflecting in the splendid sunset marvelous colors and silvery sheen.

With a sweet happiness in her heart, Christine went slowly home. She did not go into the village, she walked along the shore, over the wet sands to the little gate, which opened upon their garden. On her way she passed the life-boat. It was in full readiness for launching at a moment's notice,

CHRISTINE

and she went close to it, and patted it on the bow, just as a farmer's daughter would pat the neck of a favorite horse.

"Ye hae saved the lives of men," she said. "God bless ye, boatie!" and she said it again, and then stooped and looked at a little brass plate screwed to the stern locker, on which were engraved these words:

Put your trust in God,
And do your best.

And as she climbed the garden, she thought of the lad who had left Culraine thirty years ago, and gone to Glasgow to learn ship building, and who had given this boat to his native village out of his first savings. "And it has been a lucky boat," she said softly, "every year it has saved lives," and then she remembered the well-known melody, and sang joyously—

"Weel may the keel row,
And better may she speed,
Weel may the keel row,
That wins the bairnies' bread.

"Weel may the keel row,
Amid the stormy strife,
Weel may the keel row
That saves the sailor's life.

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

"God bless the Life-Boat!

In the stormy strife,
Saving drowning men,
On the seas o' Fife.

"Weel may her keel row—"

Then with a merry, inward laugh she stopped, and said with pretended displeasure: "Be quiet, Christine! You're makin' poetry again, and you shouldna do the like o' that foolishness. Neil thinks it isna becoming for women to mak' poetry—he says men lose their good sense when they do it, and women! He hadna the words for their shortcomings in the matter. He could only glower and shake his head, and look up at the ceiling, which he remarked needed a coat o' clean lime and water. Weel, I suppose Neil is right! There's many a thing not becomin' to women, and nae doubt makin' poetry up is among them."

When she entered the cottage, she found the Domine, Dr. Magnus Trenabie, drinking a cup of tea at the fireside. He had been to the pier to see the boats sail, for all the men of his parish were near and dear to him. He was an extraordinary man—a scholar who had taken many degrees and honors, and not exhausted his mental powers in getting them—a calm, sabbatic mystic, usually so quiet that his simple presence had a sacramental efficacy—a man who never reasoned, being full of

CHRISTINE

faith; a man enlightened by his heart, not by his brain.

Being spiritually of celestial race, he was lodged in a suitable body. Its frame was Norse, its blood Celtic. He appeared to be a small man, when he stood among the gigantic fishermen who obeyed him like little children, but he was really of average height, graceful and slender. His head was remarkably long and deep, his light hair straight and fine. The expression of his face was usually calm and still, perhaps a little cold, but there was every now and then a look of flame. Spiritually, he had a great, tender soul quite happy to dwell in a little house. Men and women loved him, he was the angel on the hearth of every home in Culrairie.

When Christine entered the cottage, the atmosphere of the sea was around and about her. The salt air was in her clothing, the fresh wind in her loosened hair, and she had a touch of its impetuosity in the hurry of her feet, the toss of her manner, the ring of her voice.

"O Mither!" she cried, then seeing the Domine, she made a little curtsey, and spoke to him first. "I was noticing you, Sir, among the men on the pier. I thought you were going with them this night."

"They have hard work this night, Christine, and my heart tells me they will be wanting to say little words they would not like me to hear."

"You could hae corrected them, Sir."

"I am not caring to correct them, tonight. Words

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

often help work, and tired fishers, casting their heavy nets overboard, don't do that work without a few words that help them. The words are not sinful, but they might not say them if I was present."

"I know, Sir," answered Margot. "I hae a few o' such words always handy. When I'm hurried and flurried, I canna help them gettin' outside my lips—but there's nae ill in them—they just keep me going. I wad gie up, wanting them."

"When soldiers, Margot, are sent on a forlorn hope of capturing a strong fort, they go up to it cheering. When our men launch the big life-boat, how do they do it, Christine?"

"Cheering, Sir!"

"To be sure, and when weary men cast the big, heavy nets, they find words to help them. I know a lad who always gets his nets overboard with shouting the name of the girl he loves. He has a name for her that nobody but himself can know, or he just shouts 'Dearie,' and with one great heave, the nets are overboard." And as he said these words he glanced at Christine, and her heart throbbed, and her eyes beamed, for she knew that the lad was Cluny.

"I was seeing our life-boat, as I came home," she said, "and I was feeling as if the boat could feel, and if she hadna been sae big, I would hae put my arms round about her. I hope that wasna any kind o' idolatry, Sir?"

"No, no, Christine. It is a feeling of our hu-

CHRISTINE

manity, that is wide as the world. Whatever appears to struggle and suffer, appears to have life. See how a boat bares her breast to the storm, and in spite of winds and waves, wins her way home, not losing a life that has been committed to her. And nothing on earth can look more broken-hearted than a stranded boat, that has lost all her men. Once I spent a few weeks among the Hovellers—that is, among the sailors who man the life-boats stationed along Godwin Sands; and they used to call their boats ‘darlings’ and ‘beauties’ and praise them for behaving well.”

“Why did they call the men Hovellers?” asked Margot. “That word seems to pull down a sailor. I don’t like it. No, I don’t.”

“I have been told, Margot, that it is from the Danish word, *overlever*, which means a deliverer.”

“I kent it wasna a decent Scotch word,” she answered, a little triumphantly; “no, nor even from the English. Hoveller! You couldna find an uglier word for a life-saver, and if folk canna be satisfied wi’ their ain natural tongue, and must hae a foreign name, they might choose a bonnie one. Hoveller! Hoveller indeed! It’s downright wicked, to ca’ a sailor a hoveller.”

The Domine smiled, and continued—“Every man and woman and child has loved something inanimate. Your mother, Christine, loves her wedding ring, your father loves his boat, you love your Bible, I love the silver cup that holds the sacramental

CHRISTINE AND THE DOMINE

wine we drink 'in remembrance of Him';" and he closed his eyes a moment, and was silent. Then he gave his cup to Christine. "No more," he said, "it was a good drink. Thanks be! Now our talk must come to an end. I leave blessing with you."

They stood and watched him walk into the dusk in silence, and then Margot said, "Where's Neil?"

"Feyther asked him to go wi' them for this night, and Neil didna like to refuse. Feyther has been vera kind to him, anent his books an' the like. He went to pleasure Feyther. It was as little as he could do."

"And he'll come hame sea-sick, and his clothes will be wet and uncomfortable as himsel'."

"Weel, that's his way, Mither. I wish the night was o'er."

"Tak' patience. By God's leave the day will come."

CHAPTER III

ANGUS BALLISTER

If Love comes, it comes; but no reasoning can put it there.

Love gives a new meaning to Life.

Her young heart blows

Leaf by leaf, coming out like a rose.

THE next morning the women of the village were early at the pier to watch the boats come in. They were already in the offing, their gunwales deep in the water, and rising heavily on the ascending waves; so they knew that there had been good fishing. Margot was prominent among them, but Christine had gone to the town to take orders from the fish dealers; for Margot Ruleson's kippered herring were famous, and eagerly sought for, as far as Edinburgh, and even Glasgow.

It was a business Christine liked, and in spite of her youth, she did it well, having all her mother's bargaining ability, and a readiness in computing values, that had been sharpened by her knowledge of figures and profits. This morning she was unusually fortunate in all her transactions, and brought home such large orders that they staggered Margot.

ANGUS BALLISTER

"I'll ne'er be able to handle sae many fish," she said, with a happy purposeful face, "but there's naething beats a trial, and I be to do my best."

"And I'll help you, Mither. It must ne'er be said that we twa turned good siller awa'."

"I'm feared you canna do that today, Christine. Neil hasna been to speak wi', since he heard ye had gone to the toun; he wouldna' even hear me when I ca'ed breakfast."

"Neil be to wait at this time. It willna hurt him. If Neil happens to hae a wish, he instantly feels it to be a necessity, and then he thinks the hale house should stop till his wish is gi'en him. I'm going to the herring shed wi' yoursel'."

"Then there will be trouble, and no one so sorry for it as Christine! I'm telling you!"

At this moment Neil opened the door, and looked at the two women. "Mother," he said in a tone of injury and suffering, "can I have any breakfast this morning?"

"Pray, wha's hindering you? Your feyther had his, an hour syne. Your porridge is yet boiling in the pot, the kettle is simmering on the hob, and the cheena still standing on the table. Why didna you lift your ain porridge, and mak' yoursel' a cup o' tea? Christine and mysel' had our breakfasts before it chappit six o'clock. You cam' hame wi' your feyther, you should hae ta'en your breakfast with him."

"I was wet through, and covered with herring

CHRISTINE

scales. I was in no condition to take a meal, or to sit with my books and Christine all morning, writing."

"I canna spare Christine this morning, Neil. That's a fact." His provoking neatness and deliberation were irritating to Margot's sense of work and hurry, and she added, "Get your breakfast as quick as you can. I'm wanting the dishes out o' the way."

"I suppose I can get a mouthful for myself."

"Get a' you want," answered Margot; but Christine served him with his plate of porridge and basin of new milk, and as he ate it, she toasted a scone, and made him a cup of tea.

"Mother is cross this morning, Christine. It is annoying to me."

"It needna. There's a big take o' fish in, and every man and woman, and every lad and lass, are in the herring sheds. Mither just run awa' from them, to see what orders for kippers I had brought—and I hae brought nine hundred mair than usual. I must rin awa' and help her now."

"No, Christine! I want you most particularly, this morning."

"I'll be wi' you by three in the afternoon."

"Stay with me now. I'll be ready for you in half an hour."

"I can hae fifty fish ready for Mither in half an hour, and I be to go to her at once. I'll be back, laddie, by three o'clock."

"I'm just distracted with the delay," but he

ANGUS BALLISTER

stopped speaking, for he saw that he was alone. So he took time thoroughly to enjoy his scone and tea, and then, not being quite insensible to Christine's kindness, he washed the dishes and put them away.

He had just finished this little duty, when there was a knock at the outside door. He hesitated about opening it. He knew no villager would knock at his father's door, so it must be a stranger, and as he was not looking as professional and proper as he always desired to appear, he was going softly away, when the door was opened, and a bare-footed lad came forward, and gave him a letter.

He opened it, and looked at the signature—"Angus Ballister." A sudden flush of pleasure made him appear almost handsome, and when he had read the epistle he was still more delighted, for it ran thus:

DEAR NEIL,

I am going to spend the rest of vacation at Ballister Mansion, and I want you with me. I require your help in a particular business investigation. I will pay you for your time and knowledge, and your company will be a great pleasure to me. This afternoon I will call and see you, and if you are busy with the nets, I shall enjoy helping you.

Your friend,

ANGUS BALLISTER.

Neil was really much pleased with the message, and glad to hear of an opportunity to make money,

CHRISTINE

for though the young man was selfish, he was not idle; and he instantly perceived that much lucrative business could follow this early initiation into the Ballister affairs. He quickly finished his arrangement of the dishes and the kitchen, and then, putting on an old academic suit, made his room as scholarly and characteristic as possible. And it is amazing what an *air* books and papers give to the most commonplace abode. Even the old inkhorn and quill pens seemed to say to all who entered—"Tread with respect. This is classic ground."

His predominating thought during this interval was, however, not of himself, but of Christine. She had promised to come to him at three o'clock. How would she come? He was anxious about her first appearance. If he could in any way have reached her, he would have sent his positive command to wear her best kirk clothes, but at this great season neither chick nor child was to be seen or heard tell of, and he concluded finally to leave what he could not change or direct to those household influences which usually manage things fairly well.

As the day went on, and Ballister did not arrive, he grew irritably nervous. He could not study, and he found himself scolding both Ballister and Christine for their delay. "Christine was so ta'en up wi' the feesh, naething else was of any import to her. Here was a Scottish gentleman coming, who might be the makin' o' him, and a barrel o' herrin' stood in his way. He had actually fretted himself into

ANGUS BALLISTER

his Scotch form of speech, a thing no Gael ever entirely forgets when really worried to the proper point.

When he had said his heart's say of Christine, he turned his impatience on Ballister—his behavior was that o' the ordinary rich young man, who has naething but himsel' to think o'. He, Neil Ruleson, had lost a hale morning's wark, waiting on his lairdship. Weel, he'd have to pay for it, in the long run. Neil Ruleson had no waste hours in his life. Nae doubt Ballister had heard o' a fast horse, or a fast——

Then Ballister knocked at the door, and Neil stepped into his scholarly manner and speech, and answered Ballister's hearty greeting in the best English style.

"I am glad to see you, Neil. I only came to Ballister two days ago, and I have been thinking of you all the time." With these words the youth threw his Glengary on the table, into the very center and front of Neil's important papers. Then he lifted his chair, and placed it before the open door, saying emphatically as he did so——

Lands may be fair ayont the sea,
But Scotland's hills and lochs for me!

O Neil! Love of your ain country is a wonderful thing. It makes a man of you."

"Without it you would not be a man."

CHRISTINE

Ballister did not answer at once, but stood a moment with his hand on the back of the deal, rush-bottomed chair, and his gaze fixed on the sea and the crowd of fishing boats waiting in the harbor.

Without being strictly handsome, Ballister was very attractive. He had the tall, Gaelic stature, and its reddish brown hair, also brown eyes, boyish and yet earnest. His face was bright and well formed, his conversation animated, his personality, in full effect, striking in its young alertness.

"Listen to me, Neil," he said, as he sat down. "I came to my majority last March, when my uncle and I were in Venice."

"Your uncle on your mother's side?"

"No, on the sword side, Uncle Ballister. He told me I was now my own master, and that he would render into my hands the Brewster and Ballister estates. I am sure that he has done well by them, but he made me promise I would carefully go over all the papers relating to his trusteeship, and especially those concerning the item of interests. It seems that my father had a good deal of money out on interest—I know nothing about interest. Do you, Neil?"

"I know everything that is to be known. In my profession it is a question of importance."

"Just so. Now, I want to put all these papers, rents, leases, improvements, interest accounts, and so forth, in your hands, Neil. Come with me to Ballister, and give the mornings to my affairs. Find

ANGUS BALLISTER

out what is the usual claim for such service, and I will gladly pay it."

"I know the amount professionally charged, but——"

"I will pay the professional amount. If we give the mornings to this work, in the afternoons we will ride, and sail, fish or swim, or pay visits—in the evenings there will be dinner, billiards, and conversation. Are you willing?"

"I am delighted at the prospect. Let the arrangement stand, just so."

"You will be ready tomorrow?"

"The day after tomorrow."

"Good. I will——"

Then there was a tap at the door, and before Neil could answer it, Christine did so. As she entered, Ballister stood up and looked at her, and his eyes grew round with delighted amazement. She was in full fisher costume—fluted cap on the back of her curly head, scarlet kerchief on her neck, long gold rings in her ears, gold beads round her throat, and a petticoat in broad blue and yellow stripes.

"Christine," said Neil, who, suddenly relieved of his great anxiety, was unusually good-tempered. "Christine, this is my friend, Mr. Angus Ballister. You must have heard me speak of him?"

"That's a fact. The man was your constant talk"—then turning to Ballister—"I am weel pleased to see you, Sir;" and she made him a little curtsy so full of independence that Ballister knew well she

CHRISTINE

was making it to herself—"and I'm wondering at you twa lads," she said, "sitting here in the house, when you might be sitting i' the garden, or on the rocks, and hae the scent o' the sea, or the flowers about ye."

"Miss Ruleson is right," said Ballister, in his most enthusiastic mood. "Let us go into the garden. Have you really a garden among these rocks? How wonderful!"

How it came that Ballister and Christine took the lead, and that Neil was in a manner left out, Neil could not tell; but it struck him as very remarkable. He saw Christine and his friend walking together, and he was walking behind them. Christine, also, was perfectly unembarrassed, and apparently as much at home with Ballister as if he had been some fisher-lad from the village.

Yet there was nothing strange in her easy manner and affable intimacy. It was absolutely natural. She had never realized the conditions of riches and poverty, as entailing a difference in courtesy or good comradeship; for in the village of Culrairie, there was no question of an equality founded on money. A man or woman was rated by moral, and perhaps a little by physical qualities—piety, honesty, courage, industry, and strength, and knowledge of the sea and of the fisherman's craft. Christine would have treated the great Duke of Fife, or Her Majesty, Victoria, with exactly the same pleasant familiarity.

ANGUS BALLISTER

She showed Ballister her mother's flower garden, that was something beyond the usual, and she was delighted at Ballister's honest admiration and praise of the lovely, rose-sweet plot. Both seemed to have forgotten Neil's presence, and Neil was silent, blundering about in his mind, looking for some subject which would give him predominance.

Happily strolling in and out the narrow walks, and eating ripe gooseberries from the bushes, they came to a little half-circle of laburnum trees, drooping with the profusion of their golden blossoms. There was a wooden bench under them, and as Christine sat down a few petals fell into her lap.

"See!" she cried, "the trees are glad o' our company," and she laid the petals in her palm, and added—"now we hae shaken hands."

"What nonsense you are talking, Christine," said Neil.

"Weel then, Professor, gie us a bit o' gude sense. Folks must talk in some fashion."

And Neil could think of nothing but a skit against women, and in apologetic mood and manner answered:

"I believe it is allowable to talk foolishness, in reply to women's foolishness."

"O Neil, that is cheap! Women hae as much gude sense as men hae, and whiles they better them"—and then she sang, freely and clearly as a bird, two lines of Robert Burns' opinion—

CHRISTINE

"He tried His prentice hand on man,
And then He made the lasses O!"

She still held the golden blossoms in her hand, and Ballister said:

"Give them to me. Do!"

"You are vera welcome to them, Sir. I dinna wonder you fancy them. Laburnum trees are money-bringers, but they arena lucky for lovers. If I hed a sweetheart, I wouldna sit under a laburnum tree wi' him, but Feyther is sure o' his sweetheart, and he likes to come here, and smoke his pipe. And Mither and I like the place for our bit secret cracks. We dinna heed if the trees do hear us. They may tell the birds, and the birds may tell ither birds, but what o' that? There's few mortals wise enough to understand birds. Now, Neil, come awa wi' your gude sense, I'll trouble you nae langer wi' my foolishness. And good day to you, Sir!" she said. "I'm real glad you are my brother's friend. I dinna think he will go out o' the way far, if you are wi' him."

Ballister entreated her to remain, but with a smile she vanished among the thick shrubbery. Ballister was disappointed, and somehow Neil was not equal to the occasion. It was hard to find a subject Ballister felt any interest in, and after a short interval he bade Neil good-bye and said he would see him on the following day.

"No, on the day after tomorrow," corrected Neil.
"That was the time fixed, Angus. Tomorrow I will

ANGUS BALLISTER

finish up my work for the university, and I will be at your service, very happily and gratefully, on Friday morning." Then Neil led him down the garden path to the sandy shore, so he did not return to the cottage, but went away hungry for another sight of Christine.

Neil was pleased, and displeased. He felt that it would have been better for him if Christine had not interfered, but there was the delayed writing to be finished, and he hurried up the steep pathway to the cottage. Some straying vines caught his careless footsteps, and threw him down, and though he was not hurt, the circumstance annoyed him. As soon as he entered the cottage, he was met by Christine, and her first remark added to his discomfort:

"Whate'er hae you been doing to yoursel', Neil Ruleson? Your coat is torn, and your face scratched. Surely you werna fighting wi' your friend."

"You know better, Christine. I was thrown by those nasty blackberry vines. I intend to cut them all down. They catch everyone that passes them, and they are in everyone's way. They ought to be cleared out, and I will attend to them tomorrow morning, if I have to get up at four o'clock to do it."

"You willna touch the vines. Feyther likes their fruit, and Mither is planning to preserve part o' it. And I, mysel', am vera fond o' vines. The wee wrens, and the robin redbreasts, look to the vines

CHRISTINE

for food and shelter, and you'll not dare to hurt their feelings, for

"The Robin, wi' the red breast,
The Robin, and the wren,
If you do them any wrong,
You'll never thrive again."

"Stop, Christine, I have a great deal to think of, and to ask your help in."

"Weel, Neil, I was ready for you at three o'clock, and then you werna ready for me."

"Tell me why you dressed yourself up so much? Did you know Ballister was coming?"

"Not I! Did you think I dressed mysel' up for Angus Ballister?"

"I was wondering. It is very seldom you wear your gold necklace, and other things, for just home folk."

"Weel, I wasn't wearing them for just hame folk. Jennie Tweedie is to be married tonight, and Mither had promised her I should come and help them lay the table for the supper, and the like o' that. Sae I was dressed for Jennie Tweedie's bridal. I wasna thinking of either you, or your fine friend."

"I thought perhaps you had heard he was coming. Your fisher dress is very suitable to you. No doubt you look handsome in it. You likely thought its novelty would—would—make him fall in love with you."

ANGUS BALLISTER

"I thought naething o' that sort. Novelty! Where would the novelty be? The lad is Fife. If he was sae unnoticing as never to get acquaint wi' a Culrairie fisher-wife, he lived maist o' his boyhood in Edinburgh. Weel, he couldna escape seeing the Newhaven fisherwomen there, nor escape hearing their wonderful cry o' 'Caller herrin'!' And if he had ony feeling in his heart, if he once heard that cry, sae sweet, sae heartachy, and sae winning, he couldna help looking for the woman who was crying it; and then he couldna help seeing a fisher-wife, or lassie. I warn you not to think o' me, Christine Ruleson, planning and dressing mysel' for any man. You could spane my love awa' wi' a very few o' such remarks."

"I meant nothing to wrong you, Christine. All girls dress to please the men."

"Men think sae. They are vera mich mista'en. Girls dress to outdress each ither. If you hae any writing to do, I want to gie you an hour's wark. I'll hae to leave the rest until morning."

Then Neil told her the whole of the proposal Angus had made him. He pointed out its benefits, both for the present and the future, and Christine listened thoughtfully to all he said. She saw even further than Neil did, the benefits, and she was the first to name the subject nearest to Neil's anxieties.

"You see, Neil," she said, "if you go to Ballister, you be to hae the proper dress for every occasion."

CHRISTINE

The best suit ye hae now will be nane too good for you to wark, and to play in. You must hae a new suit for ordinary wear, forbye a full dress suit. I'll tell you what to do—David Finlay, wha dresses a' the men gentry round about here, is an old, old friend o' Feyther's. They herded together, and went to school and kirk together, and Feyther and him have helped each ither across hard places, a' their life long."

"I don't want any favors from David Finlay."

"Hae a little patience, lad. I'm not asking you to tak' favors from anyone. I, mysel', will find the money for you; but I canna tell you how men ought to dress, nor what they require in thae little odds and ends, which are so important."

"Odds and ends! What do you mean?"

"Neckties, gloves, handkerchiefs, hats, and a proper pocket book for your money. I saw Ballister take his from his pocket, to put the laburnum leaves in, and I had a glint o' the bank bills in it, and I ken weel it is more genteel-like than a purse. I call things like these 'odds and ends.'"

"Such things cost a deal of money, Christine."

"I was coming to that, Neil. I hae nearly ninety-six pounds in the bank. It hes been gathering there, ever since my grandfeyther put five pounds in for me at my baptism—as a nest egg, ye ken—and all I hae earned, and all that Feyther or Mither hae gien me, has helped it gather; and on my last birthday, when Feyther gave me a pound, and Mither ten shill-

ANGUS BALLISTER

ings, I had ninety-six pounds. Now, Neil, dear lad, you can hae the use o' it all, if so be you need it. Just let Dave Finlay tell you what to get, and get it, and pay him for it—you can pay me back, when money comes easy to you."

"Thank you, Christine! You have always been my good angel. I will pay you out o' my first earnings. I'll give you good interest, and a regular I. O. U. which will be——"

"What are you saying, Neil? Interest! Interest! Interest on love? And do you dare to talk to me anent your I. O. U. If I canna trust your love, and your honor, I'll hae neither interest nor paper from you. Tak my offer wi' just the word between us, you are vera welcome to the use o' the money. There's nae sign o' my marrying yet, and I'll not be likely to want it until my plenishing and napery is to buy. You'll go to Finlay, I hope?"

"I certainly will. He shall give me just what is right."

"Now then, my time is up. I will be ready to do your copying at five o'clock in the morning. Then, after breakfast, you can go to the town, but you won't win into the Bank before ten, and maist likely Finlay will be just as late. Leave out the best linen you hae, and I'll attend to it, wi' my ain hands."

"Oh, Christine, how sweet and good you are! I'm afraid I am not worthy o' your love!"

"Vera likely you are not. Few brothers love their

CHRISTINE

sisters as they ought to. It willna be lang before you'll do like the lave o' them, and put some strange lass before me."

"There's nae lass living that can ever be to me what you hae been, and are. You hae been mother and sister baith, to me."

"Dear lad, I love thee with a' my heart. All that is mine, is thine, for thy use and help, and between thee and me the word and the bond are the same thing."

Christine was much pleased because Neil unconsciously had fallen into his Scotch dialect. She knew then that his words were spontaneous, not of consideration, but of feeling from his very heart.

In a week the change contemplated had been fully accomplished. Neil had become accustomed to the luxury of his new home, and was making notable progress in the work which had brought him there.

Twice during the week Margot had been made royally happy by large baskets of wonderful flowers and fruit, from the Ballister gardens. They were brought by the Ballister gardener, and came with Neil's love and name, but Margot had some secret thoughts of her own. She suspected they were the result of a deeper and sweeter reason than a mere admiration for her wonderful little garden among the rocks; but she kept such thoughts silent in her heart. One thing she knew well, that if Christine were twitted on the subject, she would hate Angus

ANGUS BALLISTER

Ballister, and utterly refuse to see him. So she referred to the gifts as entirely from Neil, and affected a little anxiety about their influence on Ballister.

"I hope that young man isna thinking," she said, "that his baskets o' flowers and fruit is pay enough for Neil's service."

"Mither, he promised to pay Neil."

"To be sure. But I didna hear o' any fixed sum. Some rich people hae a way o' giving sma' favors, and forgetting standing siller."

"He seemed a nice young man, Mither, and he did admire your garden. I am sure he has told Neil to send the flowers because you loved flowers. When folk love anything, they like others who love as they do. Mebbe they who love flowers hae the same kind and order o' souls. You ken if a man loves dogs, he is friendly at once wi' a stranger who loves dogs; and there's the Domine, who is just silly anent auld coins—copper, siller or gold—he cares not, if they're only auld enough. Nannie Grant, wha keeps his house, told Katie Tweedie that he took a beggar man into his parlor, and ate his dinner with him, just because he had a siller bit o' Julius Cæsar in his pouch, and wouldna part wi' it, even when he was wanting bread."

"Weel then, the Domine doubtless wanted the penny."

"Vera likely, but he wouldna tak it frae the puir soul, wha thought sae much o' it; and Nannie was

CHRISTINE

saying that he went away wi' a guid many Victoria pennies i' his pouch."

"The Domine is a queer man."

"Ay, but a vera guid man."

"If he had a wife, he would be a' right."

"And just as likely a' wrang. Wha can tell?"

"Weel, that's an open question. What about your ain marriage?"

"I'll marry when I find a man who loves the things I love."

"Weel, the change for Neil, and for the a' of us has been—in a way—a gude thing. I'll say that."

Margot was right. Even if we take change in its widest sense, it is a great and healthy manifestation, and it is only through changes that the best lives are made perfect. For every phase of life requires its own environment, in order to fulfill perfectly its intention and if it does not get it, then the intent, or the issue, loses much of its efficiency. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God," is a truth relative to the greatest nations, as well as to the humblest individual.

Neil was benefited in every way by the social uplift of a residence in a gentleman's home, and the active, curious temperament of Angus stimulated him. Angus was interested in every new thing, in every new idea, in every new book. The world was so large, and so busy, and he wanted to know all about its goings on. So when Neil's business was over for the day, Angus was eagerly waiting to tell

ANGUS BALLISTER

him of something new or strange which he had just read, or heard tell of, and though Neil did not realize the fact, he was actually receiving, in these lively discussions with his friend, the very best training for his future forensic and oratorical efforts.

Indeed he was greatly pleased with himself. He had not dreamed of being the possessor of so much skill in managing an opposite opinion; nor yet of the ready wit, which appeared to flow naturally with his national dialect. But all this clever discussion and disputing was excellent practice, and Neil knew well that his visit to Ballister had been a change full of benefits to him.

One of the results of Neil's investigations was the discovery that Dr. Magnus Trenabie had been presented to the church of Culrairie by the father of Angus, and that his salary had never been more than fifty pounds a year, with the likelihood that it had often been much less. Angus was angry and annoyed.

"I give my gamekeeper a larger salary," he said. "It is a shame! The doctor's salary must be doubled at once. If there are any technicalities about it, look to them as quickly as possible. Did my father worship in that old church?"

"He did, and I have heard my father tell very frequently, how the old man stood by the church when the great Free Kirk secession happened. He says that at that burning time everyone left Dr. Trenabie's church but Ballister and ten o' his tenants,

CHRISTINE

and that the doctor took no notice of their desertion, but just preached to your father and the ten faithful. He was never heard to blame the lost flock, and he never went into the wilderness after them. Your father would not hear of his doing so.

"Magnus," he would say, "tak' time, and bide a wee. The puir wanderers will get hungry and weary in their Free Kirk conventicles, and as the night comes on, they'll come hame. Nae fear o' them!"

"Did they come home?"

"Every one of them but three stubborn old men. They died out of its communion, and the old Master pitied them, and told their friends he was feared that it would go a bit hard wi' them. He said, they had leaped the fence, and he shook his head, and looked down and doubtful anent the outcome, since naebody could tell what ill weeds were in a strange pasture."

After this discovery Angus went to the old church, where his father had worshiped, and there he saw Christine, and there he fell freshly in love with her every Sabbath day. It did not appear likely that love had much opportunity, in those few minutes in the kirk yard after the service, when Neil and Angus waited for Margot and Christine, to exchange the ordinary greetings and inquiries. James Ruleson, being leading elder, always remained a few minutes after the congregation had left, in order

ANGUS BALLISTER

to count the collection and give it to the Domine, and in those few minutes Love found his opportunity.

While Neil talked with his mother of their family affairs, Angus talked with Christine. His eyes rained Love's influence, his voice was like a caress, the touch of his hand seemed to Christine to draw her in some invisible way closer to him. She never remembered the words he said, she only knew their inarticulate meaning was love, always love. When it was time for Ruleson to appear, Margot turned to Angus and thanked him for some special gift or kindness that had come to the cottage that week, and Angus always laughed, and pointing to Neil, said:

"Neil is the culprit, Mrs. Ruleson. It is Neil's doing, I assure you." And of course this statement might be, in several ways, the truth. At any rate, the old proverb which advises us "never to look a gift horse in the mouth," is a good one. For the motive of the gift is more than the gift itself.

These gifts were all simple enough, but they were such as delighted Margot's childlike heart—an armful of dahlias or carnations—a basket of nectarines or apricots—two or three dozen fresh eggs—a pot of butter—a pair of guinea fowls, then rare in poultry yards, or a brood of young turkeys to feed and fatten for the New Year's festival. About these fowls, Neil wrote her elaborate directions. And Margot was more delighted with these

CHRISTINE

simple gifts than many have been with a great estate. And Christine knew, and Angus knew that she knew, and it was a subtle tie between them, made of meeting glances and clasping hands.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

The winds go up and down upon the sea,
And some they lightly clasp, entreating kindly,
And waft them to the port where they would be:
And other ships they buffet long and blindly.
The cloud comes down on the great sinking deep,
And on the shore, the watchers stand and weep.

SO the busy fishing season passed away, and was a very fortunate one, until it was nearly over. Then there were several days of foggy, dismal weather, and one night when the nets were down a sudden violent storm drove from the north, and the boats, being at that time mostly open boats, shipped water at every sea. The greatest hurry and confusion followed, and they were finally compelled to cut the nets adrift, glad indeed to lose all, if they could only make the first shelter. And mothers and wives, standing helpless at the little windows of their cottages, watched the storm, while the men they loved were fighting the furious tempest in the black night.

"God help my men!" prayed Margot. She was weeping like a child, but yet in her anguish full of faith in God's mercy, and looking trustfully to Him

CHRISTINE

to send her men home again. "I'll ne'er fret for the nets," she said, "they'll hav' to go, nae doubt o' that. Let them go! But oh, Feyther i' heaven, send hame my men folk!"

Ah! Women who spend such nights may well call caller herrin' "the lives o' men"!

In the misty daylight, the men and the boats came into harbor, but the nets in every boat—each net about eight hundred and fifty yards long—were totally lost. However, the herring season was practically over. Indeed, the men were at the point of exhaustion, for the total take had been very large, and there is scarcely any human labor more severe on the physical endurance, than the fishing for caller herrin'.

It was just at this time that Neil Ruleson had to leave Culrairie for Aberdeen. He was to finish his course at the Maraschal College this year, and never before had he gone there so well provided, and never before had he felt so poor. For though he had received the unlooked-for sum of two hundred pounds for his services, he felt it to be unequal to his ambitious requirements, six weeks at Ballister House having taught him to regard many little comforts as absolute necessities.

"I am very nearly a lawyer now," he reflected, "a professional man, and I must try and look like it, and live like it. The bare room and unfashionable clothing of the past must be changed to more respectable quarters, and more appropriate garments."

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

Of course he knew that Christine would not permit him to injure his future fine prospects, but he had promised to repay the ninety pounds he had borrowed from her out of his first earnings, and he felt that the money was now due, and that he ought to pay it. But if he did so, he must simplify all his plans, and he had taken so much pleasure and pains in arranging the surroundings of his last session, that he was exceedingly loth to surrender even the least important of them.

While he was packing his trunk, and deliberating on this subject, the great storm came, and his father barely saved the boat and the lives of the men in her. The nets were gone, and his mother asked him plainly if he could not help his father to replace them.

"I will do so gladly, Mother," he answered, "when I have paid my college fees, and the like, I will see what I can spare—there is Christine's money!" he continued, in a troubled, thoughtful manner—and Margot answered,

"Ay, to be sure. If Christine hadna loaned you her money, it would hae been at her feyther's will and want, this moment, but if you are going to keep your word, and pay Christine out o' your first earnings, there's nae need to talk wi' you. Christine will help your feyther and proud and glad to do the same."

"You see, Mother, it is nearly the end of things with me at Aberdeen, and it would be hard if my

CHRISTINE

future was scrimped at its beginning. That is what Ballister thinks. 'Neil,' he said to me, 'you will have to speak before the public—lawyers and people of full standing—and you must have the dress that is proper and fitting.' ”

“Weel, your feyther will hae to get new nets—if he is to mak’ bread for the lave o’ us.”

“The herring season is over now, and there is no immediate expense regarding it.”

“You are much mista’en, and ye ken it fine! The barrels in which the fish are packed are to pay for, and the women who packed them are not fully paid. The coopers who closed the barrels, and the Fishery Office, hae yet to send in their bills.”

“The Fishery Office! What have we to do with the Fishery Office? It is a government affair.”

“Mebbe sae. But the barrels canna be shipped until an officer frae the Fishery Office puts the crown brand on every barrel. Do you think the man does that for naething?”

“I never heard of such a thing.”

“Weel, it has to be done, whether Neil Ruleson has heard o’ the thing or not.”

“What for?”

“The crown isna branded on any barrel unless the fish in it are fine, fresh, and unbroken. But as soon as the barrels get the crown, they can be shipped to foreign ports, mostly to Stettin.”

“Why Stettin?”

“I don’t know. Ask your feyther. You are just

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

making a put-aff wi' your questions. Answer me the one question I asked yoursel'—What can ye do to help your feyther? Answer me that."

"Father will not use nets until the next herring season—a whole year away—in the winter, he always does line fishing. With your help, Christine can weave new nets before they are needed."

"I see weel that you dinna intend to pay your debt to Christine, nor yet to help your feyther."

"Father has not asked me for help. Everyone knows that father is well fore-handed."

"O lad, the dear auld man barely saved the boat and the lives she carried! He has been roughly handled by winds and waves, and may hae to keep his bed awhile, and your brither Encas is that hurt and bruised, he will ne'er go fishing again, while your brither Norman has a broken arm, an' a wife that has gane into hystericals about the lost nets. You'd think it was her man she was screaming for. And Fae and Tamsen waited too lang, and went o'er the boat wi' their nets, an' there's ithers that hae broken limbs, or joints out o' place, or trouble o' some sort."

"I'm very sorry, Mother. If I could do any good to the general ill, I would do it, but if I ruined all my future life I do not see that I could help anyone. I must be just, before I am generous."

"To be sure. I hope you'll try to be just, for I am vera certain you'll ne'er be generous; and if you

CHRISTINE

are just, you'll pay your sister back her ninety pounds."

"I will have a conversation with Christine, at once. Where is she?"

"The Domine sent for her early, she has been helping him wi' the hurt folk, all day long. What hae you been doing?"

"I went down to the pier, to look after the boat. I knew father would be anxious about it. Then I had to go into the town. I was expecting an important letter, and the doctor was needing some medicines, and I brought them home with me. In one way, or another, the miserable day has gone. I hope Father is not much hurt."

"It's hard to hurt your feyther. His head keeps steady, and a steady head keeps the body as it should be—but he's strained, and kind o' shocked. The Domine gied him a powder, and he's sleeping like a baby. He'll be a' right in a day or twa."

"I would like to sit by him tonight, and do all I can, Mother."

"You may well do that, Neil; but first go and bring your sister hame. I wouldn't wonder if you might find her in Fae's cottage. His puir, silly wife let the baby fa', when she heard that her man and his boat was lost; and I heard tell Christine had ta'en the bairn in charge. It would be just like her. Weel, it's growing to candle lighting, and I'll put a crusie fu' o' oil in feyther's room, and that will light you through the night."

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

Neil found his sister sitting with Judith Macpherson and her grandson, Cluny. Cluny was not seriously hurt, but no man comes out of a life-and-death fight with the sea, and feels physically the better for it. Such tragic encounters do finally lift the soul into the region of Fearlessness, or into the still higher condition of Trustfulness, but such an education—like that of Godliness—requires line upon line, precept upon precept.

James Ruleson had been perfectly calm, even when for a few minutes it seemed as if men, as well as nets, must go to death and destruction; but James had been meeting the God "whose path is on the Great Waters," for more than forty years, and had seen there, not only His wonders, but His mercies, and he had learned to say with David, "Though He slay me, yet will I put my trust in Him."

Judith Macpherson was of a different spirit. She was a passionate old woman, and the sea had taken her husband and five sons, and her only daughter. Accordingly she hated the sea. That some day it would be "no more" was her triumphant consolation. She delighted in preaching to it this sentence of annihilation. If Judith was seen standing on the cliffs, with her arms uplifted, and her white head thrown backward, the village knew she was reminding its proud waves of their doom of utter destruction. The passionate flaming language of her denunciations will not bear transcribing, but the oldest sailors said it was "awesome and not to be listened

67
PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
ACADEMY LIBRARY

CHRISTINE

to, or spoken o'." That afternoon she had been seen on the sands, in one of her frenzies of hatred, and when Neil entered her cottage, she was still rocking herself to and fro, and muttering threats and curses.

She had attended skillfully and tenderly to Cluny's bruises and nervous excitement, but he was frightened and depressed by her mood, and he begged Christine to stay wi' him an hour or twa. And Christine had been willing. Judith was always kind to her, and the handsome lad with his boyish adoration was at least a settled feature of her life. This night she let him tell her all his plans for their happy future, and did not feel any pressure of duty to deny his hopes. He had just come out of the very jaws of Death. What could she do, but let him dream his dream and have his say?

However, in all troubles, either personal or public, it is a great thing to be still, and to whisper to the soul—"This, too, will pass!" It is behind us today, tomorrow it will be still farther away. In a week we shall not talk of it, in a month it will have passed from Life, and belong only to Memory. There is scarcely any sorrow that may not be greatly helped and soothed by this reflection. For God does not willingly afflict the children of men, and it is He Himself, that has appointed Time to be the consoler of Sorrow.

By the end of October, the village was in its normal mood and condition. All the expenses of the

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

fishing season had been paid, and the profits satisfactorily ascertained and divided. Great quantities of cord had been procured, and the women and the older men were busily making nets for the next season, while the younger men were ready for the winter's line-fishing. There was an air of content and even of happiness over the small community. It was realized that, in spite of the storm, the season had been good, and the Domine had reminded them on the last Sabbath, that they had not yet rendered thanks to God, nor even visibly told each other how good God had been to them.

For it was the custom of Culrairie to keep a day of thanks and rejoicing when the herring had been secured, and to send word to all the near-by fishers to come and rejoice with them. They began now to prepare for this festival, and in this preparation were greatly assisted by gifts from Ballister House. Neil had gone back to the Maraschal, but Angus was still at Ballister. He had been royally generous to the village in its distress, had supplied the Domine with necessary drugs and materials, and had seen to it that the injured had those little luxuries of food which tempt the convalescent. He was still more eager to help the fishers in their thanksgiving, Margot Ruleson being the authorized distributor of all his gifts, as she was also the director of all concerning the affair.

This *foy*, or fair, was to be kept on the thirty-first of October, embracing particularly the Hal-

CHRISTINE

lowe'en night so dear to the peasantry of Scotland. The Domine had selected this date, possibly because he wished to prevent its usual superstitious observance. But though some old men and women doubtless lighted their Hallowe'en fires, and baked their Hallowe'en cake, with the usual magical ceremonies, the large majority were far too busy preparing for an actual and present pleasure, to trouble themselves about prophesying spells and charms.

The day was opened by a short address to the people assembled in the old kirk. About thirty minutes covered the simple ceremony. First the Domine stood up, and the people stood up with him, and all together they recited aloud the jubilant thirty-fourth psalm. Then the Domine said,

"Sit down, friends, and take heed to what I say. I have no sermon for you today. I have no sins to charge you with, and to beg you to forsake. I have just one message. It is three words long. 'God is Love!' Whatever you hear, whatever you do, no matter what happens to you, remember that God is Love! You are heritage-born to the sea, but the way of the Lord is through the Great Waters. God must see you in your struggles, and God must love the patient, brave, sailormen. Christ showed you special favors. He might have chosen carpenters, but he chose fishermen. And for seeing God's wonders on the deep sea, you may be the sons and heirs of the prophet Jonas. Also,

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

"The church is like unto a ship:
The Scriptures are the enclosing net
And men the fishers are!

Well, then, as often as you come unto a sermon, consider how God by his preachers trawleth for your souls. Friends, in all times of your joy and your sorrow, you have the key to God's council chamber, and to God's mercy chamber. It is just 'Our Father,' and the few blessed words that follow it. There is little need for long talk. This is the day you have set for thanksgiving. Rejoice therein! God is as well pleased with your happiness, as he was and is with your good, brave work. The hard winter days wear on. Make this day a memory to brighten them. Amen."

There was a considerable number of visitors from fishing villages as far south as Largo, going from house to house, talking over old seasons with old comrades, and there were the sound of violins everywhere, and the laughter of children, in their Sunday clothes, playing in the streets. Even sorrowful Faith Balcarry was in a new dress, and was at least helping others to be happy. Indeed, it was Faith who suddenly burst into the Hall when the decorations were nearly finished, and cried, "Surely you'll show the flags o' the lads' boaties! They'll feel hurt if you slight their bits o' canvas! It is most like slighting themsel's." She had her arms full of these bits of canvas, and the men decorating the

CHRISTINE

Fishers' Hall seized them triumphantly, and told Faith they were just what they wanted; and so made Faith for once in her sad life a person helpful and of importance. Then in twenty minutes the red and blue and white ensigns were beautifully disposed among the green of larch and laurel, and the glory of marigolds and St. Michael's daisies, and of holly oaks of every brilliant color.

When the sun was setting Angus looked in. Everyone but Christine and Faith had finished his work and gone away. Faith was brushing up the scattered leaves from the floor, Christine was standing on the top step of the ladder, setting her father's flag in a halo of marigolds. He watched her without speaking until she turned, then the swift glory of her smile, and the joy of her surprise was a revelation. He had not dreamed before that she was so beautiful. He said he was hungry, and he hoped Christine would not send him all the way to Ballister for something to eat. Then what could Christine do but ask him to dinner? And she had already asked Faith. So he walked between Christine and Faith up to Ruleson's cottage. And the walk through the village was so exhilarating, he must have forgotten he was hungry, even if he was really so. There was music everywhere, there were groups of beautiful women, already dressed in their gayest gowns and finest ornaments, there were equal groups of handsome young fishermen, in their finest tweed suits, with flowing neckties of every resplendent

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

color—there was such a sense of pleasure and content in the air, that everyone felt as if he were breathing happiness.

And Margot's welcome was in itself a tonic, if anybody had needed one. Her table was already set, she was "only waiting for folks to find out they wanted their dinner—the dinner itsel' was waitin' and nane the better o' it."

Ruleson came in as she was speaking, and he welcomed the Master of Ballister with true Scotch hospitality. They fell into an easy conversation on politics, and Margot told Christine and Faith to mak' themsel's fit for company, and to be quick anent the business, or she wadna keep three folk waiting on a couple o' lasses.

In half an hour both girls came down, dressed in white. Christine had loaned Faith a white frock, and a string of blue beads, and a broad blue sash. She had arranged her hair prettily, and made the girl feel that her appearance was of consequence. And light came into Faith's eyes, and color to her cheeks, and for once she was happy, whether she knew it or not.

Christine had intended to wear a new pink silk frock, with all its pretty accessories, but a beautiful natural politeness forbade it. Faith was so abnormally sensitive, she knew she would spoil the girl's evening if she outdressed her. So she also put on a white muslin gown, made in the modest fashion of the early Victorian era. Some lace and

CHRISTINE

white satin ribbons softened it, and she had in her ears her long gold rings, and round her throat her gold beads, and amidst her beautiful hair large amber combs, that looked as if they had imprisoned the sunshine.

Margot was a good cook, and the dinner was an excellent one, prolonged—as Margot thought—beyond all reasonable length, by a discussion, between Ruleson and Angus, of the conservative policy. Ruleson smoked his pipe after dinner, and kept up the threep, and the girls put out of sight the used china, and the meat and pastries left, and Margot put on her usual Sabbath attire—a light-gray silk dress, a large white collar, and a borderless cap of lace over her dark hair. The indispensable bit of color was, in her case, supplied by a vivid scarlet shawl of Chinese crêpe, one of those heavily embroidered shawls of dazzling color, which seem in these latter days to have disappeared.

It was getting near to seven o'clock, when they entered the hall and found it already full and happy. They had not thought it necessary to wait in whispering silence, until the music came and opened the entertainment. They possessed among themselves many good story tellers, and they were heartily laughing in chorus at some comic incident which a fisherman was relating, when the Ruleson party arrived.

Then there was one long, loud, unanimous cry for Christine Ruleson, for Christine was preëminent as

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

a vive-voce story teller, a rare art even among the nations of Europe. She nodded and smiled, and without any affectation of reluctance, but with a sweet readiness to give pleasure, went at once to the platform, and as easily, and as naturally as if she were telling it at her home fireside, she raised her hand for attention, and said:

"The Wreck of the Grosvenor"

"The *Grosvenor*, an East Indiaman, homeward bound, went to pieces on the coast of Caffraria. There were a hundred and thirty-five souls on board, and they resolved to cross the trackless desert to the Dutch settlements at the Cape of Good Hope. A solitary child was among the passengers, a boy of seven years old, who had no relation on board, and when he saw the party beginning to move away, he cried after some member of it, who had been kind to him. The child's cry went to every heart. They accepted him as a sacred charge.

"By turns they carried him through the deep sand and the long grass. They pushed him across broad rivers on a little raft. They shared with him such fish as they found to eat. Beset by lions, by savages, by hunger and death in ghastly forms, they never—O Father in heaven! Thy name be blessed for it! they never forgot the child. The captain and his faithful coxswain sat down together to die, the rest go on for their lives—but they take the child with them. The carpenter, his chief friend, dies from eat-

CHRISTINE

ing, in his hunger, poisonous berries; the steward assumed the sacred guardianship of the boy. He carried him in his arms, when he himself was weak and suffering. He fed him, when he was griped with hunger. He laid his little white face against his sun-burned breast. He soothed him in all his suffering.

"Then there came a time when both were ill, and they begged their wretched companions—now very few in number—to wait for them one day. They waited two days. On the morning of the third day, they moved softly about preparing to resume their journey. The child was sleeping by the fire, and they would not wake him until the last moment. The moment comes, the fire is dying—the child is dead!

"His faithful friend staggers on for a few days, then lies down in the desert and dies. What shall be said to these two men, who through all extremities loved and guarded this Little Child?"

Christine had noticed the Domine rise, and she pointedly addressed this question to him, and he understood her wish, and lifting up his hands and his voice, he cried out triumphantly:

"They shall be raised up with the words—'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me!' These good men," he continued, "were men of the sea, Mariners of England,

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

"That guard our native seas,
Whose flag has braved a thousand years,
The battle and the breeze!"

The Domine might have continued, but there was a sudden thrill of enchanting violins, the door was flung open, and the magical notes of a foursome reel filled the room, and set the feet of all tapping the floor, and made all faces radiant with anticipation. The good man then realized that it was not his hour, and he sat down, and watched the proceedings for a few minutes. Then he saw James Ruleson take his wife's hand, and watched their first steps in the joyous reel, and he was satisfied. If the dancing was under Ruleson's control, he knew all would be done decently and in order, and he went away so quietly that his absence was not noticed for some time.

Now, if the dancing that followed was like some of our dancing of today, I should pass it with slight notice, or it might be, with earnest disapproval, but it was not. It was real dancing. It was not waltzing, nor tangoing, and it was as far as possible from the undressed posturing called classical dancing. Everyone was modestly clothed, and had his shoes and stockings on. And naturally, and as a matter of course, they obeyed the principle of real dancing, which is articulation; that is, the foot strikes the ground with every accented note of the music. This is how Goldsmith in "The Vicar of Wakefield"

CHRISTINE

shows us Olivia dancing—"her foot being as pat to the music, as its echo."

All good dancing is beautiful, and it never requires immodesty, is indeed spoiled by any movement in this direction. However, as my fisher company danced modestly and gracefully, rendering naturally the artistic demands of the music, there is no necessity to pursue the subject. As the night wore on, the dancing became more enthusiastic, and graceful gestures were flung in, and little inspiring cries flung out, and often when the fiddles stopped, the happy feet went on for several bars without the aid of music.

Thus alternately telling stories, singing, and dancing, they passed the happy hours, mingling something of heart, and brain, and body, in all they did; and the midnight found them unwearied and good-tempered. Angus had behaved beautifully. Having made himself "Hail! Well met!" with the company, he forgot for the time that he was Master of Ballister, and entered into the happy spirit of the occasion with all the natural gayety of youth.

As he had dined with Faith Balcarry, he danced with her several times; and no one could tell the pride and pleasure in the girl's heart. Then Christine introduced to her a young fisherman from Largo town, and he liked Faith's slender form, and childlike face, and fell truly in love with the lonely girl, and after this night no one ever heard Faith complain that she had no one to love, and that no

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

one loved her. This incident alone made Christine very happy, for her heart said to her that it was well worth while.

Cluny was the only dissatisfied person present, but then nothing would have satisfied Cluny but Christine's undivided attention. She told him he was "unreasonable and selfish," and he went home with his grandmother, in a pet, and did not return.

"He's weel enough awa'," said Christine to Faith. "If he couldna leave his bad temper at hame, he hadna ony right to bring it here."

Of course it was not possible for Christine to avoid all dancing with Angus, but he was reasonable and obedient, and danced cheerfully with all the partners she selected, and in return she promised to walk home in his company. He told her it was "a miraculous favor," and indeed he thought so. For never had she looked so bewilderingly lovely. Her beauty appeared to fill the room, and the calm, confident authority with which she ordered and decided events, touched him with admiring astonishment. What she would become, when *he* gave her the opportunity, he could not imagine.

At nine o'clock there was a sideboard supper from a long table at one side of the hall, loaded with cold meats, pastry, and cake. Every young man took what his partner desired, and carried it to her. Then when the women were served, the men helped themselves, and stood eating and talking with the merry, chattering groups for a pleasant half-hour, which

CHRISTINE

gave to the last dances and songs even more than their early enthusiasm. Angus waited on Christine and Faith, and Faith's admirer had quite a flush of vanity, in supposing himself to have cut the Master of Ballister out. He flattered himself thus, and Faith let him think so, and Christine shook her head, and called him "plucky and gay," epithets young men never object to, especially if they know they are neither the one nor the other.

At twelve o'clock Ruleson spoke to the musicians, and the violins dropped from the merry reel of "Clydeside Lasses" into the haunting melody of "Caller Herrin'," and old and young stood up to sing it. Margot started the "cry" in her clear, clarion-like voice; but young and old joined in the imperishable song, in which the "cry" is vocalized:

What'll buy cal - ler her - rir? They're aw a pee - ay too a pee ay,
 What'll buy cal - ler her - rir? They're aw come frae Looh - fies Come,
 friends sup - port the fish - er's trade, Who still is per - il earn's his bread, While
 round our coast all ben - post boat, He drags for cal - ler her - rir, They're
 hee ah fish, and dae ty in ring, Buy my cal - ler her - rir, They're
 aw come frae Looh - fies, What'll buy my cal - ler her - rir, There's
 naught of them will stand oom - par ing, E'en they hae the dia mond, Their
 sides like all - vee chins Cal - ler her - rir, Cal - ler her - rir

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

At one o'clock the Fishers' Hall was dark and still, and the echo of a tender little laugh or song from some couple, who had taken the longest way round for the nearest way home, was all that remained of the mirth and melody of the evening. Angus and Christine sauntered slowly through the village. The young man was then passionately importunate in the protestations of his love. He wooed Christine with all the honeyed words that men have used to the Beloved Woman, since the creation. And Christine listened and was happy.

At length, however, he was obliged to tell her news he had delayed as long as it was possible.

"Christine," he said. "Dear Christine, I am going with my Uncle Ballister to the United States. We intend to see both the northern and southern states, and in California shall doubtless find the ways and means to cross over to China and Japan, and at Hongkong get passage for India, and then——"

"And then whar next?"

"Through Europe to England. I dare say the journey will take us a whole year."

"Mair likely twa or even three years. Whatna for are you going?"

"Because my uncle is going, and he is set on having me with him."

"I wouldn't wonder. Maybe he is going just for your sake. Weel I hope you'll hae a brawly fine time, and come hame the better for it."

CHRISTINE

"I cannot tell how I am to do without seeing you, for a whole year."

"Folk get used to doing without, vera easy, if the want isn't siller. Love isna a necessity."

"O, but it is! Dear Christine, it is the great necessity."

"Weel, I'm not believing it."

Then they were at the foot of the hill on which Ruleson's house stood, and Christine said, "Your carriage is waiting for you, Angus, and you be to bid me good night, here. I would rather rin up the hill by mysel', and nae doubt the puir horses are weary standin' sae lang. Sae good night, and good-by, laddie!"

"I shall not leave you, Christine, until I have seen you safely home."

"I am at hame here. This is Ruleson's hill, and feyther and mither are waiting up for me."

A few imperative words from Angus put a stop to the dispute, and he climbed the hill with her. He went as slowly as possible, and told her at every step how beautiful she was, and how entirely he loved her. But Christine was not responsive, and in spite of his eloquent tenderness, they felt the chill of their first disagreement. When they came in sight of the house, they saw that it was dimly lit, and Christine stood still, and once more bade him good-by.

Angus clasped both her hands in his. "My love! My love!" he said. "If I spoke cross, forgive me."

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

"I hae naething to forgive. I owe you for mair pleasure and happiness, than I can ever return."

"Give me one kiss of love and forgiveness, Christine. Then I will know you love Angus"—and he tried gently to draw her closer to him. "Just one kiss, darling."

"Na! Na," she answered. "That canna be. I'm a fisher-lass, and we hae a law we dinna break—we keep our lips virgin pure, for the lad we mean to marry."

"You are very hard and cruel. You send me away almost broken-hearted. May I write to you?"

"If you'll tell me about a' the wonderfuls you see, I'll be gey glad to hear from you."

"Then farewell, my love! Do not forget me!"

"It's not likely I'll forget you," and her voice trembled, as she whispered "Farewell!" and gave him her hand. He stooped, and kissed it. Then he turned away.

She watched him till in the dim distance she saw him raise his hat and then disappear. Still she stood, until the roll of the carriage wheels gradually became inaudible. Then she knew that she was weeping, and she wiped her eyes, and turned them upon the light in the cottage burning for her. And she thought tenderly of her lover, and whispered to her heart—"If he had only come back! I might hae given him a kiss. Puir laddie! Puir, dear laddie! His uncle has heard tell o' the fisher-lassie, and he's ta'en him awa' from Christine—but he's

CHRISTINE

his ain master—sae it's his ain fault! Christine is o'er gude for anyone who can be wiled awa' by man, or woman, or pleasure, or gold. I'll be first, or I'll be naething at a'!"

She found her father alone, and wide awake. "Where is Mither?" she asked.

"I got her to go to bed. She was weary and full o' pain. Keep a close watch on your mither, Christine. The trouble in her heart grows warse, I fear. Wha was wi' you in your hame-comin'?"

"Angus Ballister."

"Weel, then?"

"It is the last time he will be wi' me."

"Is that sae? It is just as weel."

"He is awa' wi' his Uncle Ballister, for a year or mair."

"Is he thinking you'll wait, while he looks o'er the women-folk in the rest o' the warld?"

"It seems sae."

"You liked him weel enough?"

"Whiles—weel enough for a lover on trial. But what would a lass do wi' a husband wha could leave her for a year on his ain partic'lar pleasure."

"I kent you wad act wiselike, when the time came to act. There's nae men sae true as fishermen. They hae ane dear woman to love, and she's the only woman in the warld for them. Now Cluny——"

"We willna speak o' Cluny, Feyther. Both you and Mither, specially Mither, are far out o' your usual health. What for did God gie you a daugh-

THE FISHERMAN'S FAIR

ter, if it wasna to be a comfort and help to you, when you needed it? I'm no carin' to marry any man."

"Please God, you arena fretting anent Angus?"

"What for would I fret? He was a grand lover while he lasted. But when a man is feared to honor his love with his name, a lass has a right to despise him."

"Just sae! But you mustna fret yoursel' sick after him."

"Me! Not likely!"

"He was bonnie enou', and he had siller—plenty o' siller!"

"I'm no' thinkin' o' the siller, Feyther! Na, na, siller isn't in the matter, but—

"When your lover rins over the sea,
He may never come back again;
But this, or that, will na matter to me,
For my heart! My heart is my ain!"

"Then a's weel, lassie. I'll just creep into Neil's bed, for I dinna want to wake your mither for either this, or that, or ony ither thing. Good night, dearie! You're a brave lassie! God bless you!"

CHAPTER V

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

They did not separate, as if nothing had happened.

A sorrow we have looked in the face, can harm us no more.

PERHAPS Christine was not so brave as her father thought, but she had considered the likelihood of such a situation, and had decided that there was no dealing with it, except in a spirit of practical life. She knew, also, that in the long run sentiment would have to give way to common sense, and the more intimate she became with the character of Angus Ballister, the more certain she felt that his love for her would have to measure itself against the pride and will of his uncle, and the tyranny of social estimates and customs.

She was therefore not astonished that Angus had left both himself and her untrammelled by promises. He was a young man who never went to meet finalities, especially if there was anything unpleasant or serious in them; and marriage was a finality full of serious consequences, even if all its circumstances were socially proper. And what would Society say, if Angus Ballister made a fisher-girl his wife!

"I wasna wise to hae this, or that, to do wi' the

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

lad," she whispered, and then after a few moments' reflection, she added, "nor was I altogether selfish i' the matter. Neil relied on me making a friend o' him, and Mither told me she knew my guid sense wad keep the lad in his proper place. Weel, I hae done what was expected o' me, and what's the end o' the matter, Christine? Ye hae a sair heart, lass, an' if ye arena in love wi' a lad that can ne'er mak' you his wife, ye are precariously near to it." Then she was silent, while lacing her shoes, but when this duty was well finished, she continued, "The lad has gien me many happy hours, and Christine will never be the one to say, or even think, wrang o' him; we were baith in the fault—if it be a fault—as equally in the fault, as the fiddle and the fiddlestick are in the music. Weel, then what's to do? Duty stands high above pleasure, an' I must gie my heart to duty, an' my hands to duty, even if I tread pleasure underfoot in the highway in the doin' o' it."

As she made these resolutions, some strong instinctive feeling induced her to dress herself in clean clothing from head to feet, and then add bright touches of color, and the glint of golden ornaments to her attire. "I hae taken a new mistress this morning," she said, as she clasped her gold beads around her white throat—"and I'll show folk that I'm not fretting mysel' anent the auld one." And in some unreasoning, occult way, this fresh, bright clothing strengthened her.

Indeed, Margot was a little astonished when she

CHRISTINE

saw her daughter. Her husband had told her in a few words just how matters now lay between Ballister and Christine, and she was fully prepared with sympathy and counsels for the distracted, or angry, girl she expected to meet. So Christine's beaming face, cheerful voice, and exceptional dress astonished her. "Lassie!" she exclaimed. "Whatna for hae you dressed yoursel' sae early in the day?"

"I thought o' going into the toun, Mither. I require some worsted for my knitting. I'm clean out o' all sizes."

"I was wanting you to go to the manse this morning. I am feared for the pain in my breast, dearie, and the powders the Domine gies me for it are gane. I dinna like to be without them."

"I'll go for them, Mither, this morning, as soon as I think the Domine is out o' his study."

"Then I'll be contented. How are you feeling yoursel', Christine?"

"Fine, Mither!"

"'Twas a grand ploy last night. That lad, Angus Ballister, danced with a' and sundry, and sang, and ate wi' the best, and the worst o' us. I was hearing he was going awa' for a year or mair."

"Ay, to foreign parts. Rich young men think they arena educated unless they get a touch o' France or Italy, and even America isna out o' their way. You wad think a Scotch university wad be the complement o' a Scotch gentleman!"

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

"Did he bid you good-by? Or is he coming here today?"

"He isna likely to ever come here again."

"What for no? He's been fain and glad to come up here. What's changed him?"

"He isna changed. He has to go wi' his uncle."

"What did he say about marrying you? He ought to hae asked your feyther for ye?"

"For me?"

"Ay, for you."

"Don't say such words, Mither. There was no talk of marriage between us. What would Angus do with a girl like me for a wife?"

"You are gude enou' for any man."

"We are friends. We arena lovers. The lad has been friendly with the hale village. You mustna think wrang o' him."

"I do think vera wrang o' him. He is just one kind o' a scoundrel."

"You hurt me, Mither. Angus is my friend. I'll think nae wrang o' him. If he was wrang, I was wrang, and you should hae told me I was wrang."

"I was feared o' hurting Neil's chances wi' him."

"Sae we baith had a second motive."

"Ay, few folk are moved by a single one."

"Angus came, and he went, he liked me, and I liked him, but neither o' us will fret o'er the parting. It had to be, or it wouldn't hae been. Them above order such things. They sort affairs better than we could."

CHRISTINE

"I don't understand what you're up to, but I think you are acting vera unwomanly."

"Na, na, Mither! I'll not play 'maiden all forlorn' for anyone. If Angus can live without me, there isna a woman i' the world that can live without Angus as weel as Christine Ruleson can. Tuts! I hae you, Mither, and my dear feyther, and my six big brothers, and surely their love is enough for any soul through this life; forbye, there is the love beyond all, and higher than all, and truer than all—the love of the Father and the Son."

"I see ye hae made up your mind to stand by Ballister. Vera weel! Do sae! As long as he keeps himsel' in foreign pairts, he'll ne'er fret me; but if he comes hame, he'll hae to keep a few hundred miles atween us."

"Nonsense! We'll a' be glad to see him hame."

"Your way be it. Get your eating done wi', and then awa' to the manse, and get me thae powders. I'm restless and feared if I have nae i' the house."

"I'll be awa' in ten minutes now. Ye ken the Domine doesna care for seeing folk till after ten o'clock. He says he hes ither company i' the first hours o' daybreak."

"Like enou', but he'll be fain to hear about the doings last night, and he'll be pleased concerning Faith getting a sweetheart. I doubt if she deserves the same."

"Mither! Dinna say that. The puir lassie!"

"Puir lassie indeed! Her feyther left her forty

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

pounds a year, till she married, and then the principal to do as she willed wi'. I dinna approve o' women fretting and fearing anent naething."

"But if they hae the fret and fear, what are they to do wi' it, Mither?"

"Fight it. Fighting is better than fearing. Weel, tak' care o' yoursel' and mind every word that you say."

"I'm going by the cliffs on the sea road."

"That will keep you langer."

"Ay, but I'll no require to mind my words. I'll meet naebody on that road to talk wi'."

"I would not say that much."

A suspicion at once had entered Margot's heart. "I wonder," she mused, as she watched Christine out of sight—"I wonder if she is trysted wi' Angus Bal-lister on the cliff road. Na, na, she would hae told me, whether or no, she would hae told me."

The solitude of the sea, and of the lonely road, was good for Christine. She was not weeping, but she had a bitter aching sense of something lost. She thought of her love lying dead outside her heart's shut door, and she could not help pitying both love and herself. "He was like sunshine on my life," she sighed. "It is dark night now. All is over. Good-by forever, Angus! Oh, Love, Love!" she cried aloud to the sea. "Oh, you dear old troubler o' the warld! I shall never feel young again. Weel, weel, Christine, I'll not hae ye going to meet trouble, it isna worth the compliment. Angus may forget me,

CHRISTINE

and find some ither lass to love—weel, then, if it be so, let it be so. I'll find the right kind o' strength for every hour o' need, and the outcome is sure to be right. God is love. Surely that is a' I need. I'll just leave my heartache here, the sea can carry it awa', and the winds blow it far off"—and she began forthwith a tender little song, that died down every few bars, but was always lifted again, until it swelled out clear and strong, as she came in sight of the small, white manse, standing bravely near the edge of a cliff rising sheerly seven hundred feet above the ocean. The little old, old kirk, with its lonely acres full of sailors' graves, was close to it, and Christine saw that the door stood wide open, though it was yet early morning.

"It'll be a wedding, a stranger wedding," she thought. "Hame folk wouldna be sae thoughtless, as to get wed in the morning—na, na, it will be some stranger."

These speculations were interrupted by the Domine's calling her, and as soon as she heard his voice, she saw him standing at the open door. "Christine!" he cried. "Come in! Come in! I want you, lassie, very much. I was just wishing for you."

"I am glad that I answered your wish, Sir. I would aye like to do that, if it be His will."

"Come straight to my study, dear. You are a very godsend this morning."

He went hurriedly into the house, and turned to-

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

wards his study, and Christine followed him. And before she crossed the threshold of the room, she saw Angus and his Uncle Ballister, sitting at a table on which there were books and papers.

Angus rose to meet her at once. He did it as an involuntary act. He did not take a moment's counsel or consideration, but sprang to his feet with the joyful cry of a delighted boy. And Christine's face reflected the cry in a wonderful, wonderful smile. Then Angus was at her side, he clasped her hands, he called her by her name in a tone of love and music, he drew her closer to his side. And the elder man smiled and looked at the Domine, who remembered then the little ceremony he had forgotten.

So he took Christine by the hand, and led her to the stranger, and in that moment a great change came into the countenance and manner of the girl, while a peculiar light of satisfaction—almost of amusement—gleamed in her splendid eyes.

"Colonel Ballister," said the Domine, "I present to you Miss Christine Ruleson, the friend of your nephew, the beloved of the whole village of Cul-raine."

"I am happy to make Miss Ruleson's acquaintance," he replied and Christine said,

"It is a great pleasure to meet you, Sir. When you know Angus, you wish to know the man who made Angus well worth the love he wins."

The Domine and Angus looked at the beautiful girl in utter amazement. She spoke perfect Eng-

CHRISTINE

lish, in the neat, precise, pleasant manner and intonation of the Aberdeen educated class. But something in Christine's manner compelled their silence. She willed it, and they obeyed her will.

"Sit down at the table with us, Christine," said the Domine. "We want your advice;" and she had the good manners to sit down, without affectations or apologies.

"Colonel, will you tell your own tale? There's none can do it like you."

"It is thus, and so, Miss Ruleson. Two nights ago as I sat thinking of Angus in Culrairie, I remembered my own boyhood days in the village. I thought of the boats, and the sailors, and the happy hours out at sea with the nets, or the lines. I remembered how the sailors' wives petted me, and as I grew older teased me, and sang to me. And I said to my soul, 'We have been ungratefully neglectful, Soul, and we will go at once, and see if any of the old playfellows are still alive.' So here I am, and though I find by the Domine's kirk list that only three of my day are now in Culrairie, I want to do some good thing for the place. The question is, what. Angus thinks, as my memories are all of playtime, I might buy land for a football field, or links for a golf club. What do you say to this idea, Miss Ruleson?"

"I can say naething in its favor, Sir. Fishers are hard-worked men; they do not require to play hard, and call it amusement. I have heard my father say

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

that ball games quickly turn to gambling games. A game of any sort would leave all the women out. Their men are little at home, and it would be a heartache to them, if they took to spending that little in a ball field, or on the golf links."

"Their wives might go with them, Christine," said Angus.

"They would require to leave many home duties, if they did so. It would not be right—our women would not do it. Once I was at St. Andrews, and I wanted to go to the golf links with my father, but the good woman with whom we were visiting said: "James Ruleson, go to the links if so be you want to go, but you'll no daur to tak' this young lassie there. The language on the links is just awfu'. It isna fit for a decent lass to hear. No, Sir, golf links would be of no use to the women, and their value is very uncertain to men."

"Women's presence would doubtless make men more careful in their language," said Angus.

"Weel, Angus, it would be doing what my Mither ca's 'letting the price o'er-gang the profit.' "

"Miss Ruleson's objections are good and valid, and we admit them," said the Colonel; "perhaps she will now give us some idea we can work out"—and when he looked at her for response, he caught his breath at the beauty and sweetness of the face before him. "What are you thinking of?" he asked, almost with an air of humility, for the visible presence of goodness and beauty could hardly have af-

CHRISTINE

fecting him more. And Christine answered softly: "I was thinking of the little children." And the three men felt ashamed, and were silent. "I was thinking of the little children," she continued, "how they have neither schoolhouse, nor playhouse. They must go to the town, if they go to school; and there is the bad weather, and sickness, and busy mothers, and want of clothing and books, and shoes, and slates, and the like. Our boys and girls get at the Sunday School all the learning they have. The poor children. They have hard times in a fishing-village."

"You have given us the best of advice, Miss Ruleson, and we will gladly follow it," said the Colonel. "I am sure you are right. I will build a good schoolhouse in Culrairie. I will begin it at once. It shall be well supplied with books and maps, and I will pay a good teacher."

"Not a man teacher, Sir. They have small patience with little children. They will use the taws on baby hands, that cannot make a 'k' or a 'z' at first sight. Give them a woman teacher, who will not be afraid of the bairnies snuggling into her arms, and telling her all their little troubles."

"Domine," said the Colonel, "we have received our orders. What say you?"

"I say a school, by all means, Sir. To the children of Culrairie it will be a dispensation."

"First, we must have land for it."

"I was thinking, as you spoke, of James Ruleson's

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

land. It lies at the foot of his hill, and would be the very best location for a schoolhouse."

"Then we will see James Ruleson."

"Father is line-fishing now. He will not be home until five o'clock," said Christine.

"If possible, we will see him after five. Come, Domine, let us have a look through the old kirk."

"I saw it standing open," said Christine, "and I was thinking there might be a strange wedding there today."

"No, no, Christine. It was opened for the Colonel, though there are no Ballister effigies in it. If it was an old English kirk, there would be knights and crusaders, and soldiers lying there, in stone state. We do not like images in our kirks. The second command stands clean against it. Come with us, Christine, and when we return I will give you the medicine your mother requires."

So the Domine and the Colonel led the way, and Angus and Christine followed. And when they reached the kirkyard, Angus said, "Stand here a moment, you dear, dear girl, and tell me how you could talk to my uncle in the high English of Aberdeen. It was beautiful! How did you acquire it?"

"Through long years of practice, Angus. I heard all Neil's lessons, and I always spoke the English, when I was with Neil. He didna like me to speak Scotch, because he was feared of spoiling his English. It was our home secret, for it would have been

CHRISTINE

a great offense, if I had used English in the village. You can see that."

"Yes, of course."

"They dinna mind the Domine speaking English, yet if he particularly wants them to do anything, he is maist sure to drop into the most familiar Scotch."

"Neil must have had great influence over you, Christine," and Angus said the words disagreeably. He was feeling jealous of any influences but his own controlling Christine.

"Ay, I always did what he told me to do. Step softly, Angus. The Domine is talking."

When they reached the Domine's side, they found him turning the leaves of a very old Bible. "You see, Colonel," he said, "my father gave me The Book when I first came here. My ancestors have preached from it since A.D. 1616. It came to me through a long succession of good men. It has been my close, personal friend ever since. The finest Bible in Scotland could not take its place. There are pages in it that have been luminous to me. I have seen the glory shining out of the black letters. There are pages in it so sensitive to me that I feel a special spiritual emanation from them. I will be glad of a new cushion for The Book, for the one on which it now lies is worn and shabby, and that ought not to be."

"Then I cannot give you a new Bible, even for the church."

"Impossible! I could not preach from a new

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

Bible. Colonel, it is not a book, it is a friend. We have secrets together. I have promises from it, that are yet owing me. It holds our confidences for thirty years. Sometimes I think it really speaks to me. Sometimes a glory seems to shine over the page I am reading, and my soul is so happy, that my tongue speaks aloud joyfully the shining words that have been given me."

"I would not separate you from such a Bible, Sir."

"I shall be grateful if you give me a new cushion for it. Nothing is too good for The Book."

Then they stood looking thoughtfully over the bare place. It had an old, past look. It was plain and moldy, and needed repairing in every way. The Colonel made a note of what was required in the nave of the kirk, and then glanced upward. The gallery appeared to be in still worse condition, but in front of it there was a wonderfully beautiful model of a full-rigged ship.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Colonel, "a ship instead of a clock! Is that right, Sir?"

"Quite. I put it there. It was made by a sailor lad born in Culraine, who came here to die. Long, painful, hopeless days were soothed by the fashioning of that miniature ship. All the village watched its progress, all felt an interest in the dying lad. He finished it on the eve of his death. Young and old came to bid him good-by, and to see his white, trembling hands dress the topmost spar, and fly the blue Peter. 'I am just about to sail,' he said, 'sae

CHRISTINE

I'll up wi' the blue Peter. That means I'm ready to go. Let her carry it till I'm safely hame.' I put a new Peter on the top-mast last year," said the Domine, and his eyes filled with tears, as he looked steadfastly at the emblem.

"We seem to expect a clock in the front of the gallery, Sir. Can a ship take its place?"

"Nothing, nothing, could be more appropriate. The favorite image of the church in all ages has been a ship, or a boat. The first preaching was connected with a ship, for while Noah builded the ark, he preached repentance. The holiest object of the Jewish tabernacle was the ark, made like a boat. All Christ's known life is associated with boats. The favorite image of the early persecuted church was a boat beaten by the winds and waves, and our own churches preserve everywhere this world-wide idea, by calling the body of the church the nave, from navis, a ship."

"That is very interesting information, Sir," said Angus.

"You are going to Venice, Ballister; you will find many of the oldest churches in Venice built in the shape of a ship; and near Lisbon there is a chapel of marble, with pillars like masts, and its sails and cordage carved on the walls. Is not this life a voyage to the eternal shores, and what could typify our safety better than a ship with Christ for the captain of our salvation? You see, I will still be preaching. I make no excuse."

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

"None is necessary. We are glad to listen."

"Come now, Christine, and I will give you medicine for your mother. Gentlemen, in a few minutes I will return here."

When they were alone the Domine said: "Christine, you did wisely, and your speech was correct and beautiful, but I would advise you to keep your English for special occasions."

"Sir, not even my father and mother know I can drop the Scotch. When the time comes to tell them, I——"

"Yes, yes. And the villagers? It might be an offense."

"You are right, Sir."

"You speak as if you had learned to speak at the Maraschal."

"Yes, sir. I learned it from Neil. We always talked it together, for Neil hated the dialect, and I made a bargain wi' him. I promised to talk as he taught me, if he would keep the circumstance from everyone. He said he would, and he has stood by his promise. Sae have I, but I hae been talking English nearly five years now."

"You wonderful woman! Then this morning you gave yourself away."

"I wanted to do it—I couldna resist the want. And it was only to you, and the twa Ballisters. Nane o' you three will go blabbing. Anyway, when Neil leaves the Maraschal, he will care little how I talk."

CHRISTINE

He'll hae finer folk than Christine, to crack and claver wi'."

"He will not find finer folk easily. Now run home as quickly as you can, and prepare your father and mother for the Ballister visit. I will come with him, and ask your mother to have a cup of tea by the fire for us."

"Will Angus be wi' ye, Sir?"

"No, he will not."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to send him to the factor's, and also to Lawyer Semple's. You need not be looking for him. Try and leave well alone. It is hard to make well better, and it is very easy to make it worse. If you hurry a little, I think you may be home by twelve o'clock."

So Christine hurried a little, and reached home by the noon hour. Her dinner was ready, and her father very unexpectedly was sitting by the fire-side.

"Feyther," she said, "I hope you arena sick," and then she smiled at the inquiry, for his broad, rosy face was the very picture of robust health.

"Sick! Na, na, lassie! I'm weel enou', but Norman was feeling badly. His arm hurts him sairly, and I was noticing that the fish had gane to deep waters. We'll hae a storm before long."

Then Christine served the dinner waiting for her, and while they were eating, she told the great news of a school for Culraine. Ruleson was quickly en-

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

thusiastic. Margot, out of pure contradiction, deplored the innovation.

The walk to the toun, she said, was gude for the childer. If they were too tired to learn after it, it showed that learning was beyond their capabilities, and that they would be better making themsel's usefu' at hame. And what were women with large families to do without their big lads to bring water to wash wi', and their half-grown lasses to tak' care o' the babies, and help wi' the cooking and cleaning?

"But, Margot," said Ruleson, "think o' the outcome for the childer—— Think o'——"

"Ye dinna require to tell me the outcome. As soon as the childer get what they ca' an education, they hurry awa' to some big city, or foreign country, and that's the end o' them. Settle a school here, and I'll tell you the plain result—in a few years we'll hae neither lads nor boats, and the lasses now growing up will hae to go to Largo, or to some unken place for husbands. Gie our lads books, and you'll ne'er get them into the boats. That's a fact! I'm tellin' you!"

Between Margot and Christine the argument continued all afternoon, but Ruleson went to the foot of the hill, and looked at the land proposed for the site of the future school. He was glad that it was his land, and he was so much of a natural poet that he could see the white building, and the boys and girls trooping in and out of its wide doors. And

CHRISTINE

the vision of the children playing together there was so clear to his imagination, that he carefully stepped off the acres he supposed would give them sufficient room for their games; and then shutting his eyes that he might see better, he decided that it was too small, and so stepped off another acre.

"I'll ne'er scrimp the childer, God bless them!" he thought, "for it will be a happy day to James Ruleson, when he sees them runnin' to these acres wi' books and balls in their hands."

Then he went home, and Margot said something about his Sunday claes, but James did not heed her. He put on a clean shirt, and a suit of blue flannel. His shirt was open at the throat, his feet were in boots that reached nearly to his knees. But he had a grandly satisfied look, and the beautiful courtesy of men who as a rule think only good of their neighbors, and do only good to them.

Margot, like Christine, was in her fisher-costume, with little accentuations in Christine's case; but Margot was the very mate for the splendid man she called "her man." Scotch, from head to feet, douce and domestic, yet cleverer than James, though obedient to him—a good woman, fit for the work of this world, and not forgetful concerning a better one.

Keeping in mind the Domine's directions about a cup of tea, Christine laid the table with their best linen and china, and though no difference was made in the food provided, Christine saw that it was well

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

cooked. After all, it was quite an event for James Ruleson, and in the outcome of it he expected to realize one of the greatest pleasures that could come to him.

About five o'clock the Domine and Ballister arrived. They entered a room full of the feeling of home. It was clean, and white as a snow drift, and there was a bright fire blazing on the hearth. The covered table with its knives and forks and spoons, and its gilt-rimmed teacups, was in itself a symbol of hospitality. The Domine looked at it, and then said, "Margot, you are baking sea trout. I told you never to do that again, when I was coming, unless you intended asking me to help in the eating of it."

"Today, they were cooked special for you, Sir, and I hope you will hae the good will to pleasure me in the eating o' them."

"Certainly, Margot, certainly! I could not resist your invitation."

Hearing these words, Ruleson rose, and said, "Colonel, if you will join the Domine at the meal God has gi'en us, James Ruleson will gladly break bread with you."

After these preliminaries, Christine served the meal, and then waited on her parents and their guests. They ate the fish with great enjoyment. It was to the Colonel a gastronomical discovery. No anchovy, no sauces of any kind, just the delicate fish, baked with a few slices of Ayrshire ham, and served with potatoes boiled in their jackets so skillfully that

CHRISTINE

the jackets dropped from them when touched. It was a dish pure and simple, and captivated every palate. Nothing more was needed that Christine's quiet service and the animated conversation did not supply. As to Margot, she was kept busy filling small cups with that superexcellent tea we get in Scotland, and find it next to impossible to get anywhere else.

After the fish was fully eaten, Christine—almost without notice—cleared the table, and brought on a rice pudding, and a large pitcher of cream. The men ate the whole of it. Perhaps they did so unconsciously, for they were talking about the school in an enthusiastic manner, while it was disappearing. Then James Ruleson lit his pipe, and the Colonel his cigar, and they sat down at the fireside. The Domine, with a smile of perfect happiness, sat between them, and every remnant of dinner silently disappeared.

During the hour following the Domine drafted the principal items to be discussed and provided for, and it was further resolved to call a village meeting in the Fishers' Hall, for the next evening. Then the Colonel's carriage was waiting, and he rose, but really with some reluctance. He cast his eyes over the comfortable room, and looked with admiration on the good man who called it home, on the bright, cheery woman, whose love made it worth the name, and on the girl who filled it with her beauty; and he said to Margot, "Mrs. Ruleson, I have eaten to-

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

day the very best of dinners. I enjoyed every mouthful of it."

"Indeed, the dinner was good, Colonel; and we were proud and glad o' your company."

"And you will meet us in the Hall tomorrow night, and bring all the women you can with you?"

"I'll do my best, Sir, but our women are a dour lot. They lay out their ain way, and then mak' the taking o' it a point o' duty."

And all the way to Ballister House the Colonel wondered about his dinner—no flowers on the table, no napkins, no finger bowls, no courses, no condiments or pickles, no wine, not even a thimbleful of whiskey, nothing but excellently cooked fresh fish and potatoes, a good cup of tea with it, and then a rice pudding and plenty of cream. "Wonderful!" he ejaculated. "Upon my word, things are more evenly balanced than we think. I know noblemen and millionaires that are far from being as happy, or as well fed, as Ruleson's family."

The next morning the bellman went through the village calling men and women together at half-past seven, in the Fishers' Hall; and there was great excitement about the matter. Even the boys and girls here took a noisy part in the discussion, for and against, the argument in this class being overwhelmingly in favor of the school.

Among the adults, opinion was also divided. There were lazy mothers who could not do without their girls' help, and greedy fathers who expected

CHRISTINE

their little lads to make, or at least save them a few shillings a week; and Christine feared the gift would be ungraciously taken. Ruleson had a long talk with big Peter Brodie, and Peter told him not to fash himself anent a lot o' ignorant women and men folk. If they were such fools, as not to ken a blessing when it was put into their vera hands, they ought to be made to understand the fact; and with a peculiar smile he intimated that he would take great satisfaction in gieing them as many lessons as they required.

The meeting was, however, crowded, and when the Colonel and the Domine stepped on the platform, the audience were just in the mood to give them a rousing cheer. It opened the Domine's mouth, and he said:

"Friends, I have great and good news for you. Colonel Ballister is going to build us a school of our own. We shall want some of you as Trustees, and others will have to form an executive board. We are going to have a women's board as well. The men's board will look after the management of the school. The women's board will look after the bairns, and see that they get fair play in every respect. A women's board will be a new thing, but Culrairie is not afraid of new ways, if they be better ways." Then he went into particulars, which we need not do, and concluded by telling them that James Ruleson had given land both for the school and the playground, and that it was hoped James' approval would stand for many, and much. "We will

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

now take the vote of both men and women for, or against, the school."

Then a man in the center of the crowded hall stood up. It was Peter Brodie.

"Gentlemen," he said, "a vote is outside necessity. We dinna vote as to whether we want sunshine, or fish, or bread. We are sure o' the matter. The school is mental bread and meat and sunshine to our lads and lasses. We thank God for it. There would be a deal o' trouble i' getting and counting names, and the like o' that. Let us vote, gentlemen, as our forefathers voted for the Solemn League and Covenant, by just lifting their right hands above their heads. The Domine could gie us the word, and if after it there is man or woman with baith hands down, Peter Brodie will be asking the reason why."

This speech was received with acclamation, and when the tumult had subsided, the Domine called for the silent vote of approval, that had ratified their immortal compact with their kirk. He described in picturesque words that wonderful scene in the Greyfriars' kirkyard, when sixty thousand right hands rose as promptly as one hand for the True Religion, and he told them that after the kirk, their first duty was the school. Then he stood still a moment, and there was a profound silence. After it came the word:

"Stand!"

Men and women rose as by one impulse.

CHRISTINE

"Those who are in favor of a school in Culrairie, and grateful to God and man for it, let them lift up their right hands above their heads."

Every right hand was lifted. There was not a protesting hand, and Peter Brodie observed that if there had been one, it ought to be cut off, and cast into the fire, with a' the lave o' useless members.

The meeting was then practically over, but many remained. The room was warm and lighted, and it seemed unreasonable not to have a song and story, and dance out of it. Christine was entreated to remain, but she said her mither wasna feeling well, and she be to gae hame wi' her. In truth she was much depressed because Angus had not come with his uncle. She did not like to ask why, and her heart was full of unhappy surmises. But she put the trouble aside while with her mother, and gave herself willingly to the discussion of Peter Brodie's ill-bred and forwardsome behavior.

"I perfectly thought shame of his interference," said Margot. "Mercifully he spoke some kind o' Scotch, for I hae heard him—special when he was angry—rave in his native Gaelic, and then he got his ain way, for nae decent man or woman could answer his unpronounceable words. They were just a vain babblement."

"Jean Pollok was a' for the school tonight; this morning she was raving against it."

"That was to be looked for. There is as much

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

two-facedness in some women, as there's meat in an egg."

"But for all disputing, Mither, everyone seemed to think the school would be a good thing."

"It is this, and that, and what not, and how it will end nobody knows. Some folks are ill to please, even when they get their ain way."

"You could hardly make Mary Leslie keep her sitting. She wanted to stand up, and ask the Domine how she was to cook and wash and clean and sew and nurse her baby, without the help o' her girls, Jess and Flora. She said there was eleven in her family, and she wanted to know how it was to be managed. It was hard to keep her still."

"It was vera barefaced o' her. But she put up her hand wi' the rest."

"Ay, Mither. She was feared for Peter Brodie quarreling with her man. That's Peter's way o' managing women; he mak's their husbands responsible for a' they say, and do; he says, 'the husbands ought to hae brought up their wives better.' He has done it, you know, Mither, several times."

Margot laughed. "Ay," she said, "for Tamson's wife. Naebody blamed him. Anne Tamson has a perfectly unruly tongue, and her husband, Watty, got the licking for what she said anent Frazer and his wife. I wouldna fear the man mysel', and the maist o' our women could gie him as much—and mair—than he sends."

So they talked until the cottage was reached, and

CHRISTINE

the day was over. Christine went gladly to her room. A crusie was burning on the table, and she removed her gown and uncoiled her long, brown hair. Then all was still, and she let herself think, and her decision was, "if Angus had wanted to come, he would have done so.

"It isna my place," she continued, "to tak' care on the subject. I'll no mak' mysel' and ithers miserable anent him, forbye Angus Ballister is clear outside me, and my life."

Then she rose and took a large copy book from a drawer, and sitting down at the table, took pen and ink and wrote:

November second. I was a little troubled all day about Angus. He didna come, and he didna send, and there was neither sign nor sight o' him. Weel, my warld went on wanting the lad, and the school talk filled the day, and at night I went wi' Mither to the meeting about it. From this hour I begin to forget Angus. I will ask God to keep my heart from all love's care and sorrow.

Then she put the book away, turned out the light and lay down. But the old mysterious, hungering sound of the sea had an angry sough in it; and she went to sleep fearing it, and thinking of it as a deep starless darkness, hanging over the dreamlike figures of dead sailors and fishers. At midnight she awoke, the storm her father had predicted was roaring over the great waters. She went to her little window and looked out—darkness, wildness, desolation—and she

CHRISTINE AND ANGUS

hasted and put plenty of peats on the fire, and carried her mother an extra quilt.

"I hae made up the fire, Mither dear," she said, "and if ye want to get up, you'll be warm, and I'll come and sit by you."

"Will I waken your feyther?"

"Whatna for? There's naething to fear. Norman and Eneas are doubtless at hame. Most o' our men are. Few would start after the dance. They would see the storm coming."

"Will it be a bad storm?"

"I think it will. But the sea is His, and He made it. If there is a storm He is guiding it. Ye ken how often we sing 'He plants His footsteps on the sea, and rides upon the storm.' " And so, sweet-eyed and fearless, she went away, but left peace and blessing behind her.

In the living room, she laid more peats on the fire. Then she went to her own room. Some words had been singing in her heart as she moved about, and she took the big copy book out of the drawer, and stooping to the crusie burning on the table, she wrote them down:

The night is black, the winds are wild,
The waves are taking their own will,
Dear Jesus, sleeping like a child,
Awake! and bid the storm be still.

She read the words over with a smile. "They might be worse," she thought, "but Christine! You hae

CHRISTINE

been writing poetry. You'll hae to stop that nonsense! Weel, it wasna my fault. It came o' itsel', and I dinna feel as if I had done anything much out o' the way—and I was maist asleep, if that is ony kind o' an excuse. I——"

CHAPTER VI

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS, AND A WEDDING

Because I am,
Thy clay that weeps, thy dust that cares,
Contract my hour that I may climb and find relief.

Love, thou knowest, is full of jealousy.
Love's reasons are without reason.

THE summer had been full of interest and excitement, but it was over. There was the infallible sense of ended summer, even at noon-day; and the dahlias and hollyhocks, dripping in the morning mist, seemed to be weeping for it. If it had been clear cold weather, the fishers would have been busy and happy, but it was gloomy, with black skies over the black sea, and bitter north winds that lashed the waves into fury. The open boats hardly dared to venture out, and the fish lay low, and were shy of bait.

James Ruleson, generally accompanied by Cluny Macpherson, was out every day that a boat could live on the sea, and Margot and Christine often stood together at their door or window, and watched them with anxious hearts, casting their lines in the lonely, leaden-colored sea. The boat would be one

CHRISTINE

minute on the ridge of the billow, the next minute in the trough of the sea, with a wall of water on either hand of them. And through all, and over all, the plaintive pipe of the gulls and snipe, the creaking of the boat's cordage, the boom of the breakers on the shore, the sense and the presence of danger.

And Christine knew that Cluny was in that danger for her sake. He had told her on the day after the storm, as she sat sympathetically by his side, that he was only waiting for her "yes or no." He said when she gave him either one or the other, he would go to the Henderson steamboats, in one case to work for their future happiness and home, in the other to get beyond the power of her beauty, so that he might forget her.

Forget her! Those two words kept Christine uncertain and unhappy. She could not bear to think of Cluny's forgetting her. Cluny had been part of all her nineteen years of life. Why must men be so one or the other? she asked fretfully. Why force her to an uncertain decision? Why was she so uncertain? Then she boldly faced the question and asked herself—"Is Angus Ballister the reason?" Perhaps so, though she was equally uncertain about Angus. She feared the almost insurmountable difficulties between them. Caste, family, social usage and tradition, physical deficiencies in education and in all the incidentals of polite life, not to speak of what many would consider the greatest of all short-

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

comings, her poverty. How could two lives so dissimilar as Angus Ballister's and Christine Ruleson's become one?

She asked her mother this question one day, and Margot stopped beating her oat cakes and answered, "Weel, there's a' kinds o' men, Christine, and I'll no say it is a thing impossible; but I hae come to the conclusion that in the case o' Angus and yoursel' you wouldna compluter if you lived together a' the rest o' this life."

"Why, Mither?"

"Because you are—the baity o' you—so weel satisfied wi' your present mak' up. That's a'. And it is a' that is needfu' to keep you baith from going forwarder. There's a lump a' rank cowardice in it, too."

"Mother, do you think I am a coward?"

"All women are frightened by what is said o' them, or even likely to be said o' them. And nae wonder. Women are far harder judged than men are. You would think the Ten Commands were not made for men. Yet if a woman breaks one o' them, God's sake! what a sinner she is!"

"I don't see what you are meaning, Mither."

"It's plain enou'. Men are not set down below notice, if they break the twa first a' their lives lang, if so be they pay their deficit to God in gold to the kirk. How many men do you know, Christine, who never break the third command? How many men honor the fourth? As to the fifth, Scots are maistly

CHRISTINE

ready to tak' care o' their ain folk. The sixth, seventh and eighth belong to the criminal class, and ye'll allow its maistly made up o' bad men. Concerning the ninth command, men are warse than women, but men call their ill-natured talk politics, or het'rodoxy, or some ither grand name; and I'll allow that as soon as they begin to covet their neighbor's house and wife and horses and cattle, they set to wark, and mak' money and build a bigger house than he hes, and get a bonnier wife, and finer-blooded horses and cattle—and I'm not saying whether they do well or ill—there is sae much depending on the outcome o' prosperity o' that kind. But tak' men as a whole, they leave the Ten Commands on the shoulders o' their wives."

"And do the women obey them, Mither?"

"Middling well. They do love God, and they do go to kirk. They don't swear, and as a general thing they honor their fathers and mothers. They don't, as a rule, murder or steal or tak' some ither woman's husband awa' from her. I'm no clear about women and the ninth and tenth command. They are apt to long for whatever is good and beautiful—and I don't blame them."

"I wish I was better educated, Mother. I would be able to decide between Angus and Cluny."

"Not you. The key of your life is in your heart, not in your brain."

"It is a pity."

"That is, as may be. In the long run, your feel-

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

ings will decide, and they are likely to be mair sensible than your reasons. And where love is the because o' your inquiry, I'll warrant a bit o' good sense is best o' all advisers."

"What is gude sense? How can a girl get it?"

"Gude sense is the outcome o' all our senses. As regards Ballister, ca' to your decision a bit o' wholesome pride. Ye ken what I mean."

"Weel, weel, Angus is far awa', and Cluny is only waiting the word I canna say, and what will I do when I hae nae lover at a', at a'?"

"When you haven't what you love, you must love what you hae. And I fear there is a heart fu' o' cares ready for us to sort. Geordie Sinclair was telling your father that Neil is flinging a big net i' Aberdeen—dining wi' rich folk o' all kinds, and rinnin' as close friend wi' a lad ca'ed Rath. He was saying, also, that Rath has lying siller, plenty, o' it, and that he is studying law in the same classes as Neil, at the Maraschal."

"I dinna see why we should fret oursel's anent Neil dining wi' rich folk. He was aye talkin' o' his intention to do the same. The mair rich friends he has, the better; it isna puir folk that go to law. Neil is casting his net vera prudently, nae doubt. I'll warrant it will be takin' for him even while he sleeps. Worry is just wasted on Neil."

"I'm thinking that way mysel', but feyther is feared he will be spending money he shouldna spend."

CHRISTINE

"He is lawyer enou' to ken the outcome o' that way. Neil will be on the safe side—every day, and always! There's nae need to fash oursel's anent Neil!"

"Weel then, your feyther is sairly heart-hurt anent Allan's youngest laddie. Last New Year when he went to Glasgow to see Allan, he thought things were far wrang, and he has worried himsel' on the matter ever since. It is a dreadful thing to say, but the bairn is vera delicate, and his mother isna kind to him. She is a big strong woman, ne'er sick hersel', and without feeling for a bairn that is never well, and often vera sick. Feyther said his heart was sair for the little fellow, lyin' wakefu' lang nights wi' pain and fear, and naebody in the house carin'. Yesterday feyther hed a letter frae your brither Allan, and he was fu' o' grief, and begg- ing feyther to go and see the bairn, and if possible tak' him to Culrairie, and try if we could do any- thing to help him to health and happiness."

"Will she let feyther hae him?"

"She's as uncertain as the wind, but the lad is named James after his grandfeyther, and he'll ask for him, on that plea."

"O Mither, get feyther to go at once! I'll tak' a' the trouble o' the child! Only to think o' it! Only to think o' it! A mither no carin' for her suffering child!"

"She doesna ken what suffering is, hersel'. She ne'er tak's cold and she doesna see why ither folks

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

should. She is never fearsome, or nervous, she never feels the dark to be full o' what terrifies her vera soul, and she canna understand her bairn's terror. She treats him vera much as she treats his brithers, but they are big, rugged lads, that naething hurts or frights. All right for them, but she is slowly killin' little James, and you couldna mak' her see it."

"Feyther ought not to lose an hour."

"He'll hae to be vera cautious i' the matter. Allan's wife isna easily managed. Proud and strong in her health and youth, she is fairly scounfu' o' the weak and sick, but I think your feyther can manage her. I'll get him awa' tomorrow, if so be it's possible."

Then there was such pressure of the two women brought to bear upon the grandfather's heart, that he was eager for the morning to come, and before it was yet light he was away to the town, to catch the earliest train to Edinburgh, from which place he could get quick transit to Glasgow.

"Now, Mither, we hae done a' we can, at the present, for Allan's little lad," said Christine. "Do you think feyther will write to us?"

"I'm sure he will not. He wad rayther do a hard day's work than write a letter. What are you going to do wi' your day, dearie?"

"I am going to write to Neil."

"Do. You might remind him that his feyther and mither are yet living in Culraine."

CHRISTINE

"That news isna worth while. If he wants to write, he'll write. If he doesna want to write, we arena begging letters. I'm thinking mair o' little James than I am o' Neil. You dinna like his mither, I'm thinking?"

"You're thinking right. Allan picked her up in some unkent place, and when a man lives between sailing and docking, he hasna time to ken what he's doing. Forbye, Christine, new relations dinna get into their place easy. They mind me o' that new dress my sister sent me frae Liverpool. It wanted a lot o' taking-in, and o' letting-out. It's just that way wi' new relations. Allan's wife required plentiful taking-in, and the mair letting-out there was, the mair unfittable she became." Then Margot rubbed the end of her nose with an air of scorn, and said decidedly, "She wasna a comprehensible woman. I couldna be fashed wi' her. It isna the bringing o' bairns to the birth, that hurts the heart and spoils the life o' a mither, it's the way lads and lasses marry themsel's that mak's her wish she had neither lad nor lass to her name."

"Mither, that isna like you."

"Allan was just twenty-three when he married the woman, without word or wittens to any o' us. It was a bad day's wark, and he hes never been able to mend it. For there's nae takin'-in or lettin'-out wi' his wife. She is sure she is perfect, and what will you do, what can you do, wi' a perfect woman? I hope and pray that I'll never fall

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

into that state; perfection isna suitable for this world."

"It ought to be a grand virtue, Mither."

"It's the warst o' all the vices. We hae three or four specimens o' it in the village o' Culrairie, and they are the maist unenlightened people we hae to tak' care o'. But when perfection is born o' ignorance, it is unconquerable. The Domine said sae, and that only God could manage a perfect man or woman."

"When little James comes, wouldn't it be well to hae the Domine look him over? He can tell us what's the matter wi' the laddie, and what we ought to do for him."

"That is a sensible observe, Christine. There will be nae harm in doing what it calls for."

"Now I'll awa', and write to Neil. Hae ye ony special message for him, Mither?"

"You might say I would like to ken something anent thae Rathes. They arena Fifemen, nor Shetlanders, Highland Scots, nor Lowland Scots; and I'm thinking they may be Irish, and if sae, I'm hopin' they hae the true faith."

"Mither dear, I wouldna fash wi' the Rathes. They are simply naething to us, and if we set Neil on 'praising and proving,' he'll write pages anent them."

"Sae he will. You might name the ninety pound he's owing you."

"It wouldna be advisable. Neil will pay when it's

CHRISTINE

fully convenient to himsel'. I'm not expecting a farthing until it is sae."

"I can think o' nae ither thing. It seems vera superfluous to tell Neil to be good, and to do good. He has the gift o' admiring himsel'. Tell him he can be thankful, for it isna every man that has the same capability."

"I'll read you my letter, Mither, when I hae written it."

"You'd better not. You'll say lots I wouldna say, and naething I would say, and the amends and contradictions would require another letter o' explanations. I'm going to look through my ain lads' out-grown breeks and jackets. I'll warrant wee James will come to us next door to naked."

"I didna know that you had saved the lads' auld claes."

"Did you think I wad throw them awa'? All our lads grew quick, they ne'er wore out a suit, and I put their wee breeks and coaties awa'. I thought they might come in for their ain bairns, and lo and behold! Allan's little lad is, like as not, to come into his feyther's Sunday raiment."

"Did you save their shirts and such like?"

"Why wouldn't I? But vera few linen things are left. They were too easy to wear and tear, to be long-lived, but I fancy I can find a sleeping gown for the bairn, and maybe a shirt or twa. But stockings are beyond mention. They got them into un-mendable holes, and left them in the boats, or the

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

fish sheds, and I fairly wore my knitting needles awa' knitting for lads wha wouldna use their feet ony way but skin-bare."

So the grandmother went to find what clothes she could for a little lad of eight years old, and Christine sat down to answer Neil's last letter. To herself she called it an "overflowing screed." Indeed it was full of the great Reginald Rath, his fine family, his comfortable wealth, his sister, Roberta, and her highly respectable house in the Monteith Row o'erby the Green of Glasgow City. Christine told him in reply that she was glad he had found a friend so conformable to all his wishes. She asked him if he had heard lately from Angus Ballister, and casually mentioned that the Domine had received ten days ago a letter from the Colonel about the school building, and that Angus had sent her some bonnie pictures of the city of Rome. She also informed him that his nephew was coming to Culrairie, and that she herself was going to take the charge of him, and so might not have time to write as often as she had done.

In the afternoon Faith came from the village to help with the nets a-mending, and she brought the village gossip with her, and among the news of all kinds, the date of her own marriage. She was going to wed the Largo man on Christmas Day, and she had forgotten her loneliness and melancholy, and laughed and joked pleasantly, as she went over her plans with Christine. Margot watched her, and

CHRISTINE

listened to her with great interest, and when at sunset the lassie went down the hill, she said to Christine: "Wonders never cease. Faith Balcarry was moping melancholy, she is now as merry as a cricket. She was sick and going to die, she's now well and going to marry. She had nane to love her, and nane she loved. Her whole talk now is o' the Largo man, and the wonderfu' love he has for her, and the untelling love she has for him. Weel! Weel! I hae learned ane thing this afternoon."

"What hae you learned, Mither?"

"I hae learned, that when a lass is dying wi' a sair affliction, that there is perfect salvation in a lad."

It was the evening of the third day ere James Ruleson returned home. He had met no difficulties with Mrs. Allan Ruleson that were not easily removed by the gift of a sovereign. And he found the little lad quietly but anxiously waiting for him. "My feyther whispered to me that you would come," he said softly, as he snuggled into James' capacious breast. "I was watching for you, I thought I could hear your footsteps, after twelve o'clock today they were coming nearer, and nearer—when you chappit at the door, I knew it was you—Grandfeyther!" And James held the child tighter and closer in his arms, and softly stroked the white, thin face that was pressed against his heart.

"I'm going to tak' you hame to your grandmither, and your aunt Christine," James whispered to the

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

boy. "You are going to get well and strong, and big, and learn how to read and write and play, yoursel', like ither bairns."

"How soon? How soon?"

"Tomorrow."

"I thought God didna know about me. Such long, long days and nights."

"You puir little lad! God knew all the time. It is o'er by now."

"Will it come again?"

"Never! Never again!"

The next day they left Glasgow about the noon hour. The child had no clothing but an old suit of his elder brother, and it was cold winter weather. But James made no remark, until he had the boy in the train for Edinburgh. Then he comforted him with all the kind words he could say, and after a good supper, they both went early to bed in a small Edinburgh hostelry.

In the morning, soon after nine o'clock, James took his grandson to a ready-made tailor's shop, and there he clothed him from head to feet in a blue cloth suit. From the little white shirt to the little blue cloth cap on his long fair hair, everything was fit and good, and the child looked as if he had been touched by a miracle. He was now a beautiful boy, spiritually frail and fair, almost angelic. Ruleson looked at him, then he looked at the pile of ragged clothes that had fallen from his little shrunken form, and he kicked them with his

CHRISTINE

big feet to the other end of the shop. A thick, warm overcoat, and new shoes and stockings, were added to the outfit, and then they were ready for their home train.

As they walked slowly down Prina's Street, they met a regiment of Highland soldiers, accompanied by a fine military band. The boy was enthralled, he could not speak his delight, but he looked into his grandfather's face with eyes painfully eloquent. It was evident that he had life to learn, not gradually, as the usual infant learns it; but that its good and evil would assail him through all his senses in their full force. And Ruleson understood, partially, how abnormally large and important very trivial events might appear to him.

Soon after four o'clock they arrived at their destination, and found a train omnibus about to go their way. Ruleson lifted his grandson into it, and the vehicle set them down at the foot of his own hill; then he carried the boy up to the cottage in his arms. The door was closed, but there was the shining of fire and candlelight through the windows. Yet their arrival was unnoticed, until Ruleson entered and stood the little child in the middle of the room. With a cry of welcome Margot and Christine rose. Ruleson pointed to the child standing in their midst. The next moment Christine was removing his coat and cap, and when Margot turned to him, his beauty and the pathos of his thin, white face went straight to her heart. She took him in

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

her arms and said, "Bonnie wee laddie, do ye ken that I am your grandmither?"

"Ay, grandmither," he answered, "I ken. And I hae a grandfeyther too. I am vera happy. Dinna send me awa', for ony sake."

Then the women set him in a big chair, and admired and loved him from head to feet—his fair hair, his wonderful eyes, his little hands so white and thin—his wee feet in their neat, well-fitting shoes—his dress so good and so becoming—this new bairn of theirs was altogether an unusual one in Culrairie.

Ruleson quickly made himself comfortable in his usual house dress. Christine began to set the table for their evening meal, and Margot buttered the hot scones and infused the tea. This meal had a certain air of festivity about it, and the guest of honor was the little child sitting at Ruleson's right hand.

They had scarcely begun the meal, when there was a knock at the door, and to Margot's cheerful "Come in, friend," Dr. Trenabie entered.

"Blessing on this house!" he said reverently, and then he walked straight to the child, and looked earnestly into his face. The boy looked steadily back at him, and as he did so he smiled, and held up his arms. Then the Domine stooped and kissed him, and the thin, weak arms clasped him round the neck.

It was a tender, silent moment. The man's eyes were misty with tears, and his voice had a new tone

CHRISTINE

in it as he said, "Ruleson, this little lad is mine, as well as yours. I have been spoken to. Through him we shall all be greatly blessed, and we shall yet see a grand preacher come out of the boats and the fisherman's cottage."

There was a few moments' silence, and then Margot said, "Take your sitting, Sir, and a cup o' tea will do you mair gude than doing without it."

"I'll sit down gladly." Then they talked of the child's extreme weakness and nervousness, and the Domine said that with plenty of fresh milk, and fresh fish, and with all the fresh air he could breathe, and all the sleep he could shut his eyes for, the little one would soon be well. "Then Christine," he said, "must give him his first lessons. After they have been learned, it will be joy of Magnus Trenabie to see him safe through school and college. Give me so much interest in the boy, Ruleson, for he is called and chosen, and we have in our hands the making of a Man of God."

Later in the evening, when the school affairs had been discussed and the boy and Christine had disappeared, the Domine was told the few sad incidents which made up the whole life of little James Ruleson. There was a strong tendency on his grandfather's part to make excuses for the mother of the neglected boy. "You see, Domine," he said, "she has never been sick, and her ither children are as rugged as hersel'. She couldna understand

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

James. She didna ken what to do wi' him, or for him."

"I know, Ruleson, but physical pride is as real a sin as spiritual pride, and is the cause of much suffering and unhappiness. My own father was one of those bronze men, who thought weakness to be cowardice, and sickness to be mostly imagination. His children were all weak and sensitive, but he insisted on our roughing it. Fagging and hazing were good for us, he enjoyed them. Bodily strain and mental cram were healthy hardening processes. I had a little sister, she was weak and fearful, he insisted on her taking the cold water cure. Nerves were all nonsense! 'Look at me!' he would say proudly, 'I get up early, I work all day, I know nothing about headaches, or neuralgia, or nerves'—In the world he passed for a genial, hearty man."

"We hae plenty o' such unfeeling fellows," said Ruleson. "I dinna fret, when they hae a hard spell o' rheumatism. Not I!"

"It is not mere flesh and blood, Ruleson, that moves the earth on its axis. It is men whose intelligent brows wear the constant plait of tension, whose manner reveals a debility beneath which we know that suffering lurks, and who have an unconscious plaintiveness about them. Such men have fits of languor, but let the occasion come and they command their intellect and their hands just as easily as a workman commands his tools. The mother of this boy of ours was a physical tyrant in her

CHRISTINE

home, and she never suspected that she had under her control and keeping a spirit touched and prepared for the finest issues of life. Oh, Ruleson,

“Sad it is to be weak,
And sadder to be wrong,
But if the strong God’s statutes break,
’Tis saddest to be strong.”

The child became rapidly an integral part of the household. No one thought of him as a transient guest, no one wanted him in that light, and he unconsciously made many changes. Margot often spoke to Christine of them: “Were you noticing your feyther this afternoon, Christine?” she asked one day, when little James had been two weeks with them. “Were you noticing him?”

“How, Mither, or whatna for?”

“Weel, as soon as he was inside the house, the laddie had his hand, and when he sat down he was on his knee, and showing him the book, and saying his letters to him—without missing ane o’ them, and granddad listening, and praising him, and telling him it was wonderfu’, an’ the like o’ that.”

“Weel, then, it is wonderfu’! He learns as if he was supping new milk. He’ll be ready for the school when the school is ready for him. And he’s nae trouble in ony way. The house would be gey dull wanting him.”

“That’s truth itsel’. I like to hear his soft foot-

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

steps, and I would miss his crooning voice going o'er his lessons. You mustna gie him too lang, or too many lessons. I hae heard learning tasks were bad for sickly weans."

"Perhaps that was the cause o' his mither neglecting him anent his books, and such things?"

"Not it! His mither is a lazy, unfeeling hizzy! I'd like to hae the sorting o' her—fine!"

"Maybe he was too sick to be bothered wi' books and lessons."

"Maybe he wad niver hae been sick at a', if he had been gi'en a few books and lessons. Griselda Ruleson had better keep out o' my presence. If she ventures into it, the words arena to seek, that I'll gie her."

One cold afternoon Christine was hearing the boy's lessons when Cluny Macpherson called. He looked annoyed at the child's presence and said, "I saw your mither in the village, sae I thought I wad hae a chance to speak a few words to you, wi' nane by, but oursel's."

"You needna mind wee James."

"Send him awa'. I want you, and nane but you."

James was sent away, and then Christine said, "You hae got your will, Cluny. Now what hae you to say to me, that the little one couldna listen to?"

"I want to know, Christine, when you will marry me. I hae been waiting months for that word, and I can wait nae langer. I'm goin' awa' tomorrow."

CHRISTINE

"Your waiting isna over, Cluny. Indeed no! I'm not thinking o' marriage, nor o' anything like it. I canna think o' it. Mither isna fit for any hard wark, even the making o' a bed is mair than she ought to do. I'm not thinking o' marriage. Not I!"

"It is time you were. Maist o' our girls marry when they are nineteen years auld."

"I'm not nineteen yet. I don't want to marry. I hae my wark and my duty right here, i' this house—wark that God has set me, and I'll not desert it for wark I set mysel', to please mysel'."

"That's the way wi' women. They bring up God and their duty to screen their neglect o' duty. Hae ye nae duty towards me?"

"Not that I know of."

"Will you let a lad gie ye his life-lang love, and feel nae duty anent it?"

"I dinna ask you for your love. I hae told you, mair than once, that I dinna want any man's love."

"Tuts! That is out o' all nature and custom. Ye be to marry some man."

"I havna seen the man yet."

"I'm thinking it will be Angus Ballister. I'll mak' him black and blue from head to foot, if he comes near Culraine again."

"You talk foolishness. The Ballisters own twenty houses or mair, in Culraine."

"Houses! Twa rooms, a but and a ben, and a heather roof. What are they bothering us the now for? They hae let Culraine well alane for years

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

—it is only sin' you and your beauty cam' to the forefront, that they hae remembered us. The factor, to gather their rents, was a' we saw o' them, till your brither brought that dandified lad here, and then the auld man had to come—on the report o' your beauty, nae doubt."

There was a fishing net which required mending, hanging against the wall, and Christine, standing in front of it, went on weaving the broken meshes together. She did not answer the jealous, impetuous young man, and all at once he became conscious of her silence.

"Why don't you speak to me, Christine? Oh lassie, canna you pity a lad sae miserable as I am, and a' for the love I hae for you. I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm broken-hearted, if I hae angered you! My dear! My dear love! Will ye na speak ane word to me?"

Then she turned to him a face full of pity and anger, yet strangely beautiful. "Cluny," she said, "I'll talk to you, if you'll speak o' yoursel' and let be a' ither folk."

"How can I? I'm sick wi' the fear that you love, that you intend to marry Ballister. Tell me straight, and be done wi' it, if that is what you intend to do."

"You havna any right to ask me such a question. I never gave you any right to do sae."

"You hae let me love ye wi' a' my heart and soul for fifteen years. Is that naething?"

CHRISTINE

"Ithers hae loved me, as weel as you."

"They hev not. Nane on this earth lo'es you as I lo'e you. Nane!"

The man was beyond himself in uttering these words. It was a Cluny transfigured by a great love. The loftier Inner Man spoke for his mortal brother, and Christine looked at him and was astonished. He appeared to be taller, he was wonderfully handsome, his attitude of entreaty in some way ennobled him, and his voice had a strange tone of winning command in it, as he stretched out his arms and said:

"Come to me, Christine. I love you so! I love you so! You cannot say me 'nay' this afternoon. It is perhaps the last time. My dearie, I am going away tomorrow—it might be forever."

"Cluny! Cluny! You distress me! What do you wish me to say, or do?"

"Tell me the truth about Ballister. Are you going to marry him?"

"I am not."

"Perhaps not this year—but next year?"

"I am never going to marry him in any year."

"Will you marry Cluny Macpherson?"

"It is not unlikely."

"When? Be merciful, dearie."

"There are several things in the way o' my marrying anyone just yet."

"Ay, there's that new bairn i' the house. Whatna for is he here?"

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

"He is my brither Allan's son. He is sick, we are going to mak' him weel."

"Ay, and you'll wear a' your love on the little brat, and send a man that lo'es you to death awa' hungry."

"Cluny, I love no man better than I love you. Will not that satisfy you?"

"Na. It's a mouthfu', that's a'. And it leaves me hungrier than ever;" and he smiled and clasped her hands so fondly, that she sat down beside him, and let him draw her close to his heart.

"Dearest woman on earth," he whispered, "when will you be my ain? My very ain! My wife!"

"When the right time comes, laddie. I love none better than you. I'm not likely to love anyone better. When the right time comes——"

"What do you ca' the right time?"

"When I can marry without neglecting any duty that God has left in my hands to perform, or look after. I canna say mair. There are many things to consider. Mither could not be left yet, and I am not going to leave her for any man—and I hae promised to tak' a' the care and charge o' Allan's little lad, but it's Mither I am thinking mainly on."

"How soon will she be well?"

"In God's good time."

"Christine, surely I hae trysted you this very hour. Give me ane, just ane kiss, dearie. I'll get through years, if need be, wi' a kiss and a promise, and work

CHRISTINE

will be easy to do, and siller be easy to save, if Christine be at the end o' them."

Then he kissed her, and Christine did not deny him, but when he took from his vest pocket a pretty gold ring holding an emerald stone, she shook her head.

"It's your birthstone, dearie," he said, "and it will guard you, and bring you luck, and, mind you o' me beside. Tak' it, frae Cluny, do!"

"Na, na, Cluny! I hae often heard my mither say, 'I hae plenty now, but the first thing I owned was my wedding ring.'"

"I thought it would mind you o' Cluny, and the promise ye hae just made him."

"If I mak' a promise, Cluny, I'll be requiring no reminder o' the same."

"Will you gie me a lock o' your bonnie brown hair, to wear next my heart?"

"I'll hae no charms made out o' my hair. Tak' my word, just as I gave it. As far as I know, I'll stand by my word, when the right time comes."

"If you would just say a word anent the time. I mean as to the probabilities."

"I won't. I can't, Cluny. I havna the ordering o' events. You'll be back and forth doubtless. Where are you going?"

"To the Mediterranean service, on ane o' the Henderson boats. I'll be making siller on thae boats."

"Dinna mak' it for me. It is you, your ain sel'

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

I'll marry, and I wouldna mind if we started wi' the wedding ring, as Mither did. Folks may happen live on love, but they canna live without it."

"I would hae chosen you, Christine, from out o' a warld fu' o' women, but I like to think o' you as mine by predestination, as well as choice."

"I didna think your Calvinism went that far, Cluny. They'll be haeing a kirk session on your views, if you publicly say the like. Ye be to ta' care o' the elders, laddie."

They could talk now cheerfully and hopefully, and Cluny went away from Christine that night like a new man, for

There is no pleasure like the pain
Of being loved, and loving.

Then every day seemed to be happier than the last. The child was sunshine in the house, whatever the weather might be. His thin, soft voice, his light step, above all, his shy little laugh, went to their hearts like music. He had only learned to laugh since he came to Culraine. Margot remembered the first time she had heard him laugh. She said he had been almost afraid, and that he had looked inquiringly into her face, as if he had done something he should not have done.

So the weeks and the months wore away, and the winter came, but the weather was sunny and not very cold, and in early December Ruleson

CHRISTINE

wrapped his grandson up in one of his own pilot coats, and took him to the boat, and carried him to the fishing ground, and showed him how to cast and draw the line. And Jamie took naturally to the sea, and loved it, and won Ruleson's heart over again, whenever he begged to go with him.

Then Christmas and New Year were approaching, and there were many other pleasures and interests. Faith's marriage was drawing near, and she was frequently at Ruleson's, for the girl relied on Christine's help and advice in all matters concerning the new life to which she was going. This year also, Christmas was made memorable by a box full of gifts which came all the way from Rome, with the compliments and good will of the Ballisters and which contained many remembrances for the villagers. For Ruleson himself there was a fine barometer, to Margot a brooch and earrings of white cameo, and to Christine some lovely lace, and a set of scarlet coral combs, beads, and earrings. To Christine's care there was also intrusted a box full of Roman ribbons, scarves, and neckties, their wonderful hues making them specially welcome gifts to people so fond of brilliant colors.

From these gay treasures a scarf and sash were selected for the bride, and the rest were sent on Christmas Eve to the young girls of the village. Many other pretty trifles were among the gifts—fans and sets of Roman pearls, and laces for the neck and head, and pretty veils, and fancy hand-

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

kerchiefs, and in a long letter Angus directed Christine to do her will with all he sent. He only wished to repay to the village the happy hours he had spent in it the past summer.

This letter was not lover-like, but it was friendly, and sad. He said so much might have been, and yet nothing he longed for had happened. He recalled tender little episodes, and declared they were the only memories he valued. The whole tone of the letter was the tone of a disappointed and hopeless man, to whom life had lost all its salt and savor. Christine read it carefully. She was determined not to deceive herself, and in a wakeful watch of the night, she went over it, and understood.

"There isna ony truth in it," she said to herself, "and I needna gie a thought to the lad's fine words. He is writing anent a made-up sorrow. I'll warrant he is the gayest o' the gay, and that the memory o' Christine is a little bit o' weariness to him. Weel, he has gi'en what he could buy—that's his way, and he will mak' in his way a deal o' pleasure among the young lasses." And the next day the bits of brilliant silk were sorted and assigned, and then sent to the parties chosen, with the Ballister compliments. The affair made quite a stir in the cottages, and Angus would have been quite satisfied, if he could have heard the many complimentary things that the prettiest girls in Culraine said of him.

Two days before Christmas Day, Neil made his family a short visit. He was looking very well,

CHRISTINE

was handsomely dressed, and had all the appearance and air of a man thoroughly satisfied with himself and his prospects. He only stayed a short afternoon, for his friend Reginald was waiting for him at the hotel, and he made a great deal of his friend Reginald.

"You should hae brought him along wi' you," said Margot, and Neil looked at Christine and answered—"I lost one friend, with bringing him here, and I am not a man who requires two lessons on any subject."

"Your friend had naething but kindness here, Neil," answered Christine, "and he isna o' your opinion." And then she told him of the Christmas presents sent from Rome.

"Exactly so! That is what I complain of. All these gifts to you and the villagers, were really taken from me. I have not been remembered. Last Christmas I was first of all. A woman between two men always makes loss and trouble. I ought to have known that."

"Weel, Neil," said Margot, "there's other kindnesses you can think o'er."

"I have not had a single New Year's gift this year—yet. I suppose Reginald will not forget me. I have my little offering to him ready;" and he took a small box from his pocket, and showed them a rather pretty pair of sleeve buttons. "Yes, they are pretty," he commented, "rather more than I could afford, but Reginald will return the compli-

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

ment. I dare say it will be the only one I shall receive."

"You ought not to forget, Neil," said Margot, in a not very amiable tone, "you ought to remember, that you had your New Year's gifts at Midsummer."

"Oh, I never forget that! I could not, if I would," he answered with an air of injury, and Christine to avert open disagreement, asked, "Where will you stay in Glasgow, Neil?"

"I shall stay with Reginald, at his sister's house. She lives in highly respectable style, at number twelve, Monteith Row. The row is a fine row o' stone houses, facing the famous Glasgow Green, and the Clyde river. She is a great beauty, and I expect to be the honored guest of the occasion."

"Will you hae time to hunt up your brithers in Glasgow? Some o' them will nae doubt be in port, and you might call at Allan's house, and tell them that little Jamie is doing fine."

"I do not expect I shall have a moment to spare. If I have, I will make inquiries. I think, however, Miss Rath is going to make rather a gay time in my honor, and I shall feel obligated to observe all its occasions."

"How old is Miss Rath?" asked Christine.

"I have never asked her age. I suppose she is over twenty, as she controls her own property."

"Happen you may lose your heart to her."

CHRISTINE

"O! I am not a man to lose anything so important."

"Weel, weel, you're nae wiser than the lave o' men, Neil."

"I think I am, Christine. At least, I have that reputation."

"Will you hae a cup o' tea, Neil?"

It was Christine who asked him, and he answered, "No. I had just finished a good lunch, when I came here, and Reginald said he should wait dinner for me. He orders very liberally, I must say," and he took out a new gold watch, and looked at the time.

His mother saw it at once, and glanced at Christine, who instantly followed an exclamation of wonder, by asking, "Whoever gave ye the bonnie time-piece, Neil?"

"I gave it to myself, Christine. I have been coaching Reginald, and two or three other students, and it's rather a paying business. I shall do a great deal in that way after the New Year. Well, I think I must be going."

"Your feyther will be hame within an hour. He'll hae our wonderfu' bairn wi' him. You will surely stay and see them."

"You mean Allan's son?"

"Ay," answered Christine, "he's a beauty, and he is sae clever, we'll be needing a school, and the set o' teachers in it, to keep the lad within the proper scope o' knowledge. He's a maist remarkable boy!"

"I used to fill that position," said Neil.

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

"Not you," said Margot. "You were a puir weakling, every way. It took everyone's love and labor to bring you through. I'm not sure now, if you were worth it. It was scrimp and toil through long years for a' the Rulesons."

"I am not ungrateful, Mother, and I shall no doubt win a high degree."

"We hae nae doubt you will, Neil. Dinna go as soon as you come. Feyther will be here anon."

"I cannot keep Reginald waiting. I will try and see father as I return."

So he went, and mother and sister looked at each other, and were silent. Margot opened and shut a drawer in the dresser, pushed the chair in which Neil had sat violently into its place, and then lifted a broom and flung it down with a force that is best explained by the word 'temper.' She felt unable to speak, and finally burst into passionate weeping, mingled with angry words.

"Oh, Mither! Mither! dinna tak' on that way. It's nae new thing. It's just what we expectit. You hae looked it in the face many a time. Oh, I'm sae glad his feyther wasna here!"

"His feyther ought to hae been here."

"Na! na! We dinna want feyther to think a' his love and labor was thrown awa'. It wad fairly break his heart. We must just keep the mistake to oursel's. We can forgie, and still lo'e the puir lad, but feyther wad go to extremes, both wi' Neil and himsel'. We can thole his selfishness. We aye

CHRISTINE

knew it was there. We hae held our tongues sae far. We must gae on being silent. I wouldna hae feyther know for onything. Let him hae his dream, Mither!"

"My heart feels like to break, lassie."

"Mine too, Mither. But we needna gie feyther a heart-break. We'll just keep the visit quiet."

"Your way be it, Christine."

Women do such things!

At this moment Ruleson's voice was heard. He was coming up the hill with Jamie's hand in his own. "They'll be inside in a minute, Mither—a smile frae you is worth gold now," and she stooped and kissed her mother. This unusual token of love and care went to Margot's heart with a bound.

"You dear lassie," she said. "I'll do as you say," and that moment she was called upon to make good her words. Ruleson was at the hearthstone, and Jamie was at her knees, telling her what a splendid time they had had, and how many big fish they had caught.

"Did you bring ane o' the haddocks hame with you, James?" she asked, and Ruleson answered, "I found Tamsen's boy at the pier, waiting to buy all my catch, and I thought ye wad hae something better for us."

"There's naething better than a fresh haddock. You canna cook them wrang, if you try; but I'll find something good for good fishermen like you and Jamie." And she spread the table with good

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

things, and Ruleson said softly, as if to himself—"Thou satisfieth my mouth with good things, my cup runneth over." And Christine and her mother had come very close to each other and Margot had forgotten her heart-break in Christine's kiss, and almost forgotten Neil's visit. At any rate she was quite happy to hide it from her husband. "He's like a' men," she reflected, "he doesna spit oot his anger like I do, and be rid o' it. He buries it in his heart, and he buries it alive, and it doesna gie him a moment's peace. Christine is right, and I'm glad I held my tongue, even frae good words."

When all the Ballister Christmas presents had been distributed the New Year's festival was at hand, and the village was all agog about Faith's marriage. The arrangements had been slightly changed, and after all she was to be married from Ruleson's house. Early in the morning she came up there with her simple bride garments in a leather trap, which she carried in her hand. She wanted Christine to dress her. She said, Christine had brought her all her good fortune, and she be to send her away, and then good would go with her.

So Christine dressed the timid little woman, and really made her look lovely, and at ten o'clock her Largo lover, called Willie Anderson, came there also. He had a couple of friends with him, and Ruleson himself took the place of Faith's father, and gave her his arm, as they all walked together,

CHRISTINE

very doucelly and religiously, to the Domine's house.

The Domine had been advised of the visit, and the large Bible lay open on the table. Standing before it the young couple received the Domine's charge, and then in the presence of their witnesses, pledged themselves to life-long love and devotion. The Domine entered the contract in his Kirk Book, and the witnesses signed it. Then the simple ceremony was over. The Domine blessed the bride, and she turned with a blushing, happy face to her husband.

"My ain! My wife!" he said, and gave her his arm, and Christine with her father and Anderson's two friends followed. All were very silent. The bride and bridegroom were too happy to talk, and their friends understood and sympathized with the feeling.

The day was fine and clear, and the walk back to Ruleson's was still and sweet, and in spite of its silence, very pleasant; and they had no sooner opened Ruleson's door, than their senses were refreshed by the sight of the festal table, and the odor of delicious foods. For Margot had made a wedding dinner after her own heart. One of her precious turkeys had been sacrificed, and there was that wealth of pudding and cakes and pastry which no man loves and appreciates more than the fisherman. It was an excellent dinner, well cooked, and well enjoyed, and happily prolonged with pleasant conversation, until Christine reminded them they

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

were probably keeping the crowd asked to the Fishers' Hall waiting.

In a pleasant haste they left all in James' care, and went in a body to the hall. There was quite a large company there, very well employed in practicing the steps of a new strathspey, and others in exhibiting their special bits of splendor. The whole room was flashing with Roman colors, and Judith Macpherson's Protestantism was angered by it. She said with her usual striking eloquence, that, in her opinion, they were nothing but emblems of popery. They came frae Rome. Why not? If we had elders in the kirk, worth the name o' elders, they wad ca' a session anent such a shameful exhibition o' the pope's vera signs and symbols. Indeed, she told Ruleson that she would stand up in the kirk on the next Sabbath day, if he, or someone, didna tak' the proper steps in the matter, and "I'll tell you, James Ruleson, I'm minded to go my ways to the manse right now, and bring the Domine himsel' here, to see the wicked testimonies."

Then the bridal dance began, and Ruleson drew Judith aside, and told her he would himself speak anent the colors, if she thought they were sinfu'.

"Sinfu'!" she screamed. "Why Ruleson, man, they come frae the pope, and thae men they ca' socialists. I hae heard tell o' the tricolor, and of a' the misery and sin that cam' frae it in France. Isna France i' the pope's dominions?"

"Oh no, Judith, they arena the same countries."

CHRISTINE

"James Ruleson, they may be different countries, but that tricolor sin is the same everywhere, even if it get into a godly place like Culraine. You must put a stop to our lasses wearing the pope's colors, James Ruleson. That's a fact!"

James promised to do so. In reality he would have promised anything she asked, rather than have her go to the manse and disturb the Domine. He was only too grateful to observe that the wearers of the sinful colors were not disturbed by Judith's suspicions, and that the sailormen and fishermen were apparently most in love with the girls who wore the greatest quantity of the offensive emblems.

At three o'clock the dance was over, the greetings were all said and Willie Anderson anxious to carry off his bride on the tide top. "The waters are fu' at four o'clock," he said to Ruleson, and I want to lift anchor and spread sails at the same moment. Then we'll hae wind and tide wi' us, and we'll win hame on the tide top. That would be a lucky thing, you ken, Ruleson."

"The ways o' a good man are a' lucky, Anderson, for they are ordered of the Lord, but a man must hae his way on his wedding day—maybe he'll ne'er get it again!"

So Ruleson said a few words to the chattering groups, and they instantly formed into line. The violins went first, then the bride and bridegroom. Then Ruleson and Margot, Christine and her

A CHILD, TWO LOVERS AND A WEDDING

brother Norman, and the rest as fancy led them in the selection of partners.

Willie Anderson's brand-new boat lay at the pier, and he had rigged up a little gangway trimmed with ivy between it and the shore. Every boat in harbor was flying its flag, except Anderson's boat—she was waiting for the bride, but as soon as the crowd had settled itself, Anderson went to the gangway, and a little lad waiting there for that purpose handed him a parcel. It contained the new flag for the new boat, and it was blue as the sea, and had three white words in its center, "Mine and Thine."

And while cheering filled the air, Willie wrapped it round his bride's slim form, and then lifting her in his strong arms, he leaped into the boat with her. In a few minutes the flag was flying at the masthead, the anchor lifted, and the *Mine and Thine* began her home journeying.

And as they watched her, the tide turned, the sails filled, and she danced out of harbor, for the tide ran with her, and she was timed to reach home on the tide top.

CHAPTER VII

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

Fearful commenting
Is leaden servitor to dull delay.
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child.

NEIL did not find it convenient on his return northward, to call again at the home in Culrairie. His mother was disappointed, and fretted to Christine about the neglect. His father was silent, but James Ruleson's silence often said far more than words. When all hope of a call was over, Christine wrote to her brother, telling him in plain words what desire and hope and disappointment had filled the two days previous to the re-commencement of the Maraschal classes.

Neil, dear lad, you must know that Mither was watching the road up the hill, for the past two or three days, and for the same time feyther didna go near the boats. He was watching the road likewise, for he didna want to miss you again. They were, both o' them, sairly disappointed, when you neither came, nor sent word as to what was keeping you from sae evident a duty. Ye be to remember that Mither isna as well as she should be; and you must not neglect her

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

now, Neil. You might ne'er be able to make it up to her in the future, if you do. I'm telling you, dear lad, for your ain heart's ease. Yesterday morning, she put on a clean cap and apron and sat down by the fireside to knit, and watch and listen. By and by, the cat began to wash her face, and Mither was weel pleased wi' the circumstance, for she said it was a sure sign company was coming. So she went often to the door, and watched and listened, but no company came, till sun down, when the Domine called. Mither was so disappointed she couldna steady her voice, her eyes were full o' angry tears, and she drove poor old Sandy off the hearth, and into the cold, calling him a "lying prophet," and ither hard names, to which Sandy is not accustomed. Forbye, she hasna gi'en him a drop o' milk since. Do write Mither a long letter, full o' love and hope o' better days, and make some good excuses to her, for your neglect. Christine can make them out o' her ain loving heart.

CHRISTINE.

Indeed, Christine in this letter did small justice to Margot's indignant disappointment, and now that hope was over, she made no pretense of hiding her wrong and her sorrow. The Domine saw as soon as he entered the cottage, that Margot was in great trouble, and he more than guessed the reason, for he had been called to the town very early in the day, to meet an old friend on his way to the Maraschal College, where he filled a Professor's Chair in the medical department. Passing with this friend down the High Street, he had seen Neil with Roberta Rath on his arm, examining leisurely the attractive

CHRISTINE

shop windows, while Reginald trailed at speaking distance behind them.

He kept still further behind. He had no desire to interfere. Neil had never sought his confidence, and he did not know—except through Christine's partial remarks—what the young man's private hopes and plans might be. So he listened to Margot's passionate complaints a little coldly, and she was quick to perceive it.

"You canna understand, Domine, what I suffer. Ye hae never had an ungratefu' bairn. And I'm feeling for his feyther too—the dear auld man, he'll be clean heart-broken!"

"No, no, Margot! A good heart that trusts in God, never breaks. It has no cause to break."

"It is eleven years, Domine, we hae all o' us been keepin' oursel's poor, for Neil's sake."

"The last eleven years, Margot, you have missed no good thing. God has been good to you, and to yours. I have seen! I have not forgotten!"

"Just a few kind words would hae paid for a' we hae pinched and wanted."

"There has been neither pinch nor want in your home, Margot."

"Ye don't ken a' things, Sir. My man has worked harder than he ought to hae worked."

"I think you may be mistaken, Margot. James Ruleson trusts in God. Why should he overwork himself?"

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

"To keep the roof o'er our heads, and find food for the bairns."

"Nay, nay, Margot! Prayer, and lawful work, keep the door safe, and the table spread."

"Oh Domine! If you feel that your love is slighted—that the bairn you love mair than yoursel' lightlies ye; if you feel that he's 'shamed o' you!" And Margot covered her face, and her words were lost in heart-breaking sobs.

"Margot, you must cease weeping. Will it do you any good to kill yourself? What will you say to your Maker in such case?"

"I willna be feared to say all that is in my heart to Him. He knows a mither's heart, and the griefs it tholes and carries. I canna expect you to know how love feels when it is scorned, and made little o'."

"I know something of that same sorrow, Margot. I gave the love of my life to one who scorned it. Only God knew my sorrow, but He was sufficient for my comfort. There is only one way of conquering wrongs against love, Margot."

Margot did not speak, and after a moment's pause, he asked, "Do you want to know that way?"

"No, Sir. If it is your way, I'm no able to follow it."

"Suppose you try. You think your youngest son has treated you badly?"

"Ay, I'm sure o' it, and he's treated his feyther and his brothers badly, and his one sister worse than

CHRISTINE

a'. How can folk forget injuries that tread love under feet? They canna do it."

"They can. Do you want to know how? Do you want to know how I did it?"

"I couldna walk in your shoon, Sir. They're o'er big for me."

"Tell Mither, Sir. Tell her, she'll maybe find it easier than she thinks; and maybe I could help her;" and Christine went and stood by her mother's chair, and drew her mother's head close to her breast, and kissed her softly, as she whispered, "Ask the Domine what to do wi' wrangs ye canna bear, and canna pay back?"

"That's the sair part, Sir. Christine has touched the raw. If any man or woman in the village scorns or wrangs me, I can gie them as gude as they send—words or blows—and I wad do it! Yes, I would!"

"Have you given up your kirk membership, Margot?"

"No, Sir, I hae done naething yet, requiring me to do sae; but it's hard saying what I might be driven to, if somebody doesna mak' Jess Morrison quit meddling wi' my family affairs—the lying hizzy!"

"Margot! Margot! My friend Margot! You astonish me, you trouble me!"

"Weel, Domine, I'm vera sorry to trouble you. I wad rather trouble the hale village than you. What do you want me to do?"

"Just to try for one month, my plan of treating any injustice, or injury, I receive."

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

"Weel then, what is your plan? I'm no promising to do what I'm vera sure is far oot o' my way, but if you had been injured on every side o' your heart, as I hae been, what would you do?"

"When I receive an injury, Margot, I think it calmly over, and I am sure to find some excuse for part of it—the rest I forgive."

"There's nae excuse in Neil's case, Sir."

"Yes, there are several. These Rath's promise much for his future. He may even be in love with Miss Rath, and a man in love isna a responsible creature. You hae told me, in the course of years, how much Norman's wife troubled you, and Norman could not prevent her. I have heard the same kind of story about Robert's and Allan's, and Alexander's wives. Men do not seem to be responsible, when they are seeking some woman for a wife. Take this into your thoughts, anent Neil. There were also unhappy money considerations. Evidently Neil is not ready to pay Christine's ninety pounds back, and he does not like to be questioned about it. He would rather keep out of the way. In both these cases, it is not Neil. It is first the girl, then the money. He does not despise you, he is only too considerate about Miss Rath. In the case of the money, he is perhaps counting on its use for his advancement in life, and he would rather not talk about it. He does not hate or scorn his own people, he is only looking out for his future love, and his future living. That is such a common and natural

CHRISTINE

feeling, we need not wonder and weep over it. There must be other excuses to make, if I knew all about Neil's life and hopes, and for the rest of the faults against him—forgive them, as God forgives your faults against His long suffering love and patience."

"Mebbe that is the right way, but——"

"Right! Say that word to yourself, Margot. Say it till it rings like a shout in your soul, till you feel it in your hand like a drawn sword. It is a conquering word. Say it till your weak heart grows strong."

"Mither will feel better in a few days, Sir."

"To be sure she will. Neither joy nor sorrow leaves us where it found us. Poor Neil!"

"Why 'poor Neil,' Sir?"

"Because he cannot see beyond his limit, and his limit is self, and selfishness is utter loss. They conquer who endure. Live it down. Deserting our own is a cruel, silent treason even if they deserve it. It is a sin that our souls are ashamed of. Margot, your weakness tonight came o'er you in a moment when you were slack in Faith. You are naturally and spiritually a brave woman, Margot. What have you to fear?"

"I dinna want the lad I hae nursed at my breast to be ashamed o' me—that is my fear, Domine. I dinna want to lose his love."

"Does a man ever forget the mother who bore him? I can't believe it. When all other loves

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

fade, that is green. It is nearly fifty years since I bid my mother 'good-by' for ever in this life. She is the dearest and sweetest mother to me yet. I remember her eyes, the touch of her lips, the soft caress of her hands, as if I had seen her yesterday. A man, however wicked, is not beyond hope, who yet loves his mother. Neil is not a bad boy. He will love you to the end."

"I fear, I fear, Domine, that——"

"No! You do not fear. You have nothing to fear. There was a noted preacher and poet, who shall tell you what your fear is. His name was Crashaw, and he was an Englishman, who died just about two hundred years ago and he says to a fearful soul:

"There is no storm but this
Of your own cowardice,
That braves you out.
You are the storm that mocks
Yourself, you are the rocks
Of your own doubt.
Besides this fear of danger, there's
No danger here,
And they that here fear danger,
Do deserve their fear."

"Ay, that's what you ca' poetry. I dinna understand a word o' it, but I can mind that David said, he didna fear, even in the dead-mirk-dale; but it's a far-back thought to King David, and when a mither

CHRISTINE

is angry at her bairn, she feels as if the Lord, too, was like to lose sight o' her, and that earth and heaven are baith a' wrang."

"Well, then, Margot, when you feel as if the Lord was like to lose sight o' you, then you canna lose sight o' the Lord. Then, in the words of your Covenanters' Psalms, you be to cry out: 'How lang, O Lord! Will ye mind me nae mair? How long will ye hap yer face frae me?' And then, Margot, you mind how the few verses of doubt and fear, end—'the Lord he's wrought a' things neiborlie for me'. Now, Margot, I am not going to preach to you. Your own leal heart can do that. I will just say goodnight with one verse from that same dear old book o' psalms—'Let the words o' my mouth, an' the thought o' my heart, be for pleasure in yer sight, O Lord, my strength, and my hame bringer.' I leave blessing with you."

"You werna as kind as you should hae been to the Domine, Mither. He tried to comfort you," said Christine.

"That was in the way o' his duty. What does he know, puir fellow! anent a mither's love or sorrow?"

"I'm glad feyther hes wee Jamie for his comfort."

"Ay, but Jamie doesna comfort me, in the place o' Neil."

"You hae me, Mither. Dinna forget Christine."

"Would I do that? Never! Christine is worth

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

a' the lads in Scotland. They marry—and forget."

"The Domine says he loves his mother today, better than ever, and her dead near fifty years."

"The Domine is a wonder, and he ne'er put a wife in her place. I hope your feyther didna go to the toun today. Where has Jamie been?"

"He went out with feyther, this morning. I think they went to the boats, but I canna weel say. They ought to be hame by this hour. I wonder what is keeping them sae late?"

"Weel, Christine, the trouble hes gone by, this time, and we willna ca' it back. If your feyther didna come across the lad i' the town, it will mebbe be best to let him get back to the Maraschal without remark or recollection."

"To be sure, Mither."

"I wonder what's keeping your feyther? It is too late, and too cold, for Jamie to be out."

"I hear their voices, Mither. They're coming up the hill. Stir the fire into a blaze o' welcome. Just listen to the laddie laughing—and feyther laughing too. Whatever has happened to them?"

James Ruleson and the lad at his side came into the cottage the next moment. The light of the laugh was yet on their faces, and oh, what a happy stir their advent made in the cozy, firelit room! Margot forgot she had been crying and complaining, she was helping her man take off his heavy coat, and Christine was helping the child, who was in a state of great excitement:

CHRISTINE

"I hae been to the circus!" he cried. "Christine! Gran'mither! I hae been to the circus! It was wonderful! I did not want to leave it. I wanted to stay always there. I want to go tomorrow. Gran'feyther! Will you take me tomorrow? Say yes! Do say yes!"

"Why, James!" cried Margot, "I never heard tell o' the like! Hae ye lost your senses, gudeman?"

"No, I think I hae just found them. I am sair-hearted, because I didna send all the lads there. Let us hae a cup o' tea, and we will tell you how we spent the day."

Then there was a ten minutes' hurry, and at the end a well spread table, and four happy faces round it; and as Margot handed Ruleson his big tea cup, she said, "Now, James Ruleson, tell us what you and the lad hae been after today, that took you into such a sinfu' place as a circus. You'll hae to face the Domine on the matter. You, a ruling elder, in a circus! I'm mair than astonished! I'm fairly shocked at ye! And I'm feared it was a premeditated sin. And ye ken what the Domine thinks o' premeditated sins."

"It was far from a sin o' any kind, gudewife. Jamie and I were on our way to the boat, for a few hours' fishing, when we met a lad wi' a note from Finlay, saying he wanted a few words o' advice from me, and I took a sudden thought o' a day's rest, and a bit o' pleasure wi' little Jamie. Sae, to the town we went, and first o' all to Finlay's,

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

and I had a long talk wi' him, about some railway shares he owns, on my advice; and they hae turned out sae weel, he wanted me to tak' part o' the profit. I wouldna do that, but I let him gie twenty pounds towards the school fund."

"You might hae put that twenty in your ain pouch, gudeman, and nae fault in the same. You are too liberal anent the school. Our ain lads get naething from it."

"Jamie will hae the gude o' it, and lots o' Cul-raine lads and lasses until they get a better one. Weel, so be it! After Finlay and I had finished our crack, I took Jamie to Molly Stark's, and we had a holiday dinner."

"Chicken pie! Custard pudding! Strawberry tarts! Nuts and raisins! And a big orange! Grandmither! Oh, it was beautiful! Beautiful!"

"Then we walked about the town a bit, and I saw a big tent, and men playing music before it, and when we got close pictures of animals and of horses, and men riding. And Jamie saw many little lads going in, especially one big school, and he said, 'Grandfeyther, tak' me in too!' And I took counsel wi' my ain heart for a minute, and it said to me, 'Tak' the lad in,' and so I did."

"And now you're blaming yoursel'?"

"I am not. I think I did right. There was neither sound nor sight o' wrang, and the little lad-die went wild wi' pleasure; and to tell the vera truth,

CHRISTINE

I was pleased mysel' beyond a' my thoughts and expectations. I would like to tak' you, Margot, and Christine too. I would like it weel. Let us a' go the morn's night."

"I hae not lost my senses yet, James. Me go to a circus! Culraine wad ne'er get o'er the fact. It wad be a standing libel against Margot Ruleson. As for Christine!"

"I wad like weel to go wi' Feyther."

"I'm fairly astonished at you, Christine! Lassie, the women here would ne'er see you again, they wad feel sae far above ye. I'm not the keeper o' your feyther's gude name, but I hae a charge o'er yours, and it is clear and clean impossible, for you to go to a circus."

"If Feyther goes——"

"Your feyther hasna heard the last o' his spree yet. To think o' him leaving the narrow road. Him, near saxty years old! The kirk session on the matter will be a notable one. Elders through the length and breadth o' Scotland will be takin' sides. Dear me, James Ruleson, that you, in your auld age, should come to this!" and then Margot laughed merrily and her husband and Christine understood she was only joking.

"And you'll maybe go wi' us all some afternoon, Margot?"

"Na, na, James! I'll not gie Jess Morrison, and the like o' her, any occasion for their ill tongues. They'd just glory in Margot Ruleson, Elder Rule-

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

son's wife, going to the circus. I wouldn't be against going mysel' I'd like to go, but I wouldn't gie them the pleasure o' tossing my gude name on their ill-natured tongues."

"I saw Peter Brodie there, and his three lads, and his daughter Bella."

"Weel, James, tak' the little laddie again, if so you wish. Peter will stand wi' you, and he's the real ruling elder. But Christine is different. It lets a woman down to be talked about, whether she is right, or wrang."

Then Jamie was allowed to give his version of the wonder and the joy of a circus, and the last cups of tea were turned into some glorious kind of a drink, by the laughter and delight his descriptions evoked. Then and there it was resolved that his grandfather must take him again on the following day, and with this joyous expectation in his heart, the child at last fell asleep.

When Ruleson and his wife were alone, Margot noticed that her man's face became very somber and thoughtful. He was taking his bed-time smoke by the fireside, and she waited beside him, with her knitting in her hands, though she frequently dropped it. She was sure he had something on his mind, and she waited patiently for its revealing. At length he shook the ashes from his pipe, and stood it in its proper corner of the hob, then going to the window, he looked out and said,

"It's fair and calm, thank God! Margot, I saw

CHRISTINE

Neil today." As he spoke, he sat down, and looked at her, almost sorrowfully.

"What did he say for himsel'?"

"I didna speak to him. I was in Finlay's store, at the back o' it, whar Finlay hes his office. A young man came into the store, and Finlay got up and went to speak to him. It was Rath, and when he went awa', Finlay called me, and showed me a little group on the sidewalk. They were Rath and his sister, our Neil and Provost Blackie's son."

"Our Provost Blackie's son?"

"Just sae. And Neil and him were as well met and friendly as if they had been brought up in the same cottage. The four o' them stood talking a few minutes, and then Neil offered his arm to Miss Rath, and led the young lady to a carriage waiting for them. She smiled and said something, and Neil turned and bowed to Rath and young Blackie, and then stepped into the carriage and took his seat beside the lady, and they drove off together."

"Gudeman, you arena leeing to me?"

"I am telling you the plain evendown truth, Margot."

"Did he see you?"

"No. I keepit oot o' his way."

"Whatna for?"

"I needna say the words."

"I'll say them for you—you thought he would be ashamed o' you."

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

"Ay, he might hae been. Dinna cry, woman. Dear, dear woman, dinna cry! It's our ain fault—our ain fault. If we had stood firm for the pulpit, if we had said, 'you must be either a preacher or a schoolmaster,' this wouldna hae been. We were bent on makin' a gentleman o' him, and now he prefers gentlemen to fishermen—we ought to hae expectit it."

"It is cruel, shamefu', ungratefu' as it can be!"

"Ay, but the lad is only seeking his ain good. If he still foregathered wi' our rough fisher-lads, we wouldn't like it. And we would tell him sae."

"He might hae found time to rin down, and see us for an hour or twa, and gie us the reasons for this, and that."

"He looked like he was courting the young lady—and we know of auld times, wife, that when our lads began courting, we hed to come after. I was wrang to gie in to his studying the law. Studying the gospels, he wad hae learned that there are neither rich nor poor, in God's sight. We gave the lad to God, and then we took him awa' frae God, and would mak' a lawyer and a gentleman o' him. Weel, as far as I can see, he is going to be a' we intended. We are getting what we hae worked for. There's nane to blame but oursel's."

This reasoning quite silenced Margot. She considered it constantly, and finally came to her husband's opinion. Then she would not talk about Neil, either one way, or the other, and it soon fell

CHRISTINE

out that the lad's name was never mentioned in the home where he had once ruled almost despotically. Only Christine kept her faith in Neil. She wrote him long letters constantly. She told him all that was going on in the village, all about his father and mother, the Domine and the school house. She recalled pleasant little incidents of the past, and prefigured a future when she would see him every day. And she seldom named little Jamie. She divined that Neil was jealous of the position the child had gained in the household. And Christine was no trouble-maker. Her letters were all messages of peace and good will, and without any advice from her father she had personally come to very much the same conclusion that he had arrived at. "There has been a great mistake," she said softly to herself, "and we be to mak' the best o' it. It isna beyond God's power to sort it right yet."

So Neil was seldom named unless a letter came from him, which was not a frequent occurrence. The boxes filled with home delicacies were no longer sent, nor was their absence noted, nor their presence requested. Neil was making money as a coach to younger and wealthier students. He now dined at the best hotel, and had a very good breakfast in his comfortable rooms. But Christine felt that the breaking of this tie of "something good to eat" was a serious thing. Home was a long way further off to Neil, when the motherly baskets of home-made dainties ceased coming to him, and all Chris-

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

tine's apologies—whether they touched his mother's ill health, or his own prosperity's making them unnecessary, did not mend the matter. They were just common bread and meat, mere physical things, but their want was heart-hunger, and doubt and suspicion, in place of the love and pleasure they had always caused.

Generally, however, as one interest in life dies out, another springs up, and the school building, and the little laddie kept the Ruleson family happily busy. Ruleson had been asked to superintend the building and he did the work with a completeness which was natural to him. He looked over every load of stone, and saw that the blocks of granite were well fitting, and perfect in color. He examined all the mortar made, lest the builders follow modern habits and put too much sand among the lime. He returned as unworthy many pounds of nails, which were either too short, or too slight, for the purposes for which they were intended; and the slating for the roof was a thing he did not trust to anyone but James Ruleson. So the school house and his fishing kept him busy and happy, and Margot and Christine looked at him with wonder and pleasure. He was always smiling, and always listening to Jamie, who was chattering at his side, whenever he was on land.

So life at Culraine pursued the even tenor of its way, until the middle of March, when the school was opened for a short quarter until the herring

CHRISTINE

should come on in July. The building was by no means finished, but the walls were up, the windows in, the slate roof on, and the desks and forms in place. The master's room, the painting, plastering, and decoration were untouched. Ruleson thought they could be attended to during the herring fishing, and the school formally opened in September.

To a man quite unaccustomed to business, these were tremendous, yet delightful responsibilities; and Ruleson lived between his boat and the school. When he was on land, Jamie was always at his side. Hitherto Ruleson had been noted for his reticence. Even among such a silent race as the Fife fishers his silence was remarkable. He had held his peace even from good, but the child always chattering at his side had taught him to talk. Jamie's thirst for knowledge was insatiable, he was always wanting to know something or other, and the inquisitive "why" was constantly on his lips. Few people could remember James Ruleson's laughing, now his big guffaw constantly carried on its echo the little lad's shrill treble laugh. Ruleson had many amiable qualities unused and undeveloped that the boy brought out in many different ways. In his little grandson's company he was born again, and became as a little child. This was an actual and visible conversion. The whole village testified to this wonderful new birth.

On the fourteenth of March the dream of his heart came true. He saw the little children come

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

running through the sand hills, and over the heather, to the school. From far and near, they came, wearing their best clothes, and happy as if it was a holiday. He listened to them reciting, after their teachers, a morning prayer. He heard them learning in class together the alphabet, and the first lessons in numbers and addition, a lesson which all acquired rapidly by some secret natural process. For if the teacher asked how many two and two made, he had not to wait a moment for a correct answer from every baby mouth. It amazed Ruleson, until he remembered that no one had ever taught him to count. Through generations of clever bargaining mothers, had this ability become a natural instinct. The Domine thought it might have done so.

In some way or other, the school made Christine's life very busy. She was helping weary mothers make little dresses, and little breeches, or doing a bit of cleaning for them, or perhaps cooking a meal, or nursing the baby for an hour. She was mending or weaving nets, she was redding up her own home. She was busy with the washing or ironing, or hearing Jamie's lessons, or helping her mother with the cooking. Her hands were never idle, and there was generally a smile on her face, a song on her lips, or a pleasant word for everyone within the sound of her cheerful voice.

She had also her own peculiar duties. There were long and frequent letters from Cluny to answer, and occasionally one from Angus Ballister, the latter

CHRISTINE

always enclosing a pretty piece of lace, or a trifle of some kind, special to the city he was in. Ballister's letters troubled her, for they were written still in that tone of "it might have been," with a certain faint sense of reproach, as if it was her fault, that it had not been. This was so cleverly insinuated, that there was nothing for her to deny, or to complain of. She wished he would not write, she wished he would cease sending her any reminders of "days forever gone." His sentimental letters were so evidently the outcome of a cultivated heart-breaking disappointment, that they deeply offended her sense of truth and sincerity.

One day she received from him a letter dated Madrid, and it contained a handsome lace collar, which she was asked to wear for his sake, and thus remember his love "so sorrowfully passionate, and alas, so early doomed to disappointment and despair!"

"The leeing lad!" she angrily exclaimed. "I'll just tell him the truth, and be done wi' him. I'll send him the collar back, and tell him I'm no carin' to be reminded o' him, in ony shape or fashion. I'll tell him he kens naething about love, and is perfectly ignorant o' any honest way o' makin' love. I'll tell him that he never loved me, and that I never loved him worth talking about, and that I'll be obligated to him if he'll drop the makin' believe, and write to me anent village matters, or not write at a'."

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

Days so full and so happy went quickly away, and though there had been so much to do, never had the village been ready for the herring visit, as early, and so completely, as it was this summer. When Margot's roses began to bloom, the nets were all leaded, and ready for the boats, and the boats themselves had all been overhauled and their cordage and sails put in perfect condition. There would be a few halcyon days of waiting and watching, but the men were gathering strength for the gigantic labor before them, as they lounged on the pier, and talked sleepily of their hopes and plans.

It was in this restful interval that James and Margot Ruleson received a letter from their son Neil, inviting them to the great Commencement of his college. He said he was chosen to make the valedictory speech for his class, that he had passed his examination with honor, and would receive his commission as one of Her Majesty's attorneys at law. "If you would honor and please me by your presence, dear father and mother," he wrote, "I shall be made very happy, and I will secure a room for you in the house where I am living, and we can have our meals together."

It is needless to say this letter canceled all faults. Margot was delighted at the prospect of a railway journey, and a visit to Aberdeen. She was going to see for herself what a university was like—to see the hundreds o' lads studying for the law and the gospel there—to hae a change in the weary same-

CHRISTINE

ness of her hard fisher life. For a few days she was going to be happy and play, hersel', and see her lad made a gentleman, by the gracious permission o' Her Majesty, Queen Victoria.

The invitation being gladly accepted, Margot had anxious consultations with Christine about her dress. She knew that she was the handsomest woman in Culrairie, when she wore her best fishing costume; "but I canna wear the like o' it," she said in a lingering, rather longing tone.

"Na, na, Mither, ye be to dress yoursel' like a' ither ladies. Your gray silk is fine and fitting, but you must hae a new bonnet, and white gloves, and a pair o' patent leather shoon—a low shoe, wi' bows o' black ribbon on the instep. There's few women hae a neater foot than you hae, and we'll gae the morn and get a' things needfu' for your appearance. Feyther hes his kirk suit, and he is requiring naething, if it be not a pair o' gloves."

"He never puts a glove on his hand, Christine."

"Ay, weel, he can carry them in his hand. They are as respectable in his hands, as on them. It is just to show folk that he can afford to glove his hands, if he wants to do it. That is maistly what people wear fine claes of all kinds for. They would be happier i' their ivery day loose and easy suits, I'm thinking," said Christine.

"I wonder why Neil didna ask you, Christine. You helped him many a weary hour to the place he is now standing on. If he had not asked anyone

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

else, he ought to hae bidden you to his finishing and honoring. Why didn't he do that proper thing? Hae ye ony quarrel wi' him?"

"Not a word oot o' place between us. I wrote him a four-page letter three days syne."

"What's the matter, then?"

"He's feared for me, Mither. He's feared his friend Reginald will do as Angus did, fa' in love wi' me, and then get oot o' love wi' him. Men are silly as bairns anent some things. I'm not carin', Mither. Someone must bide at hame, and look after wee Jamie, and you yoursel' will be mair contented if you ken I am here to tak' tent o' the house and bairn, and the lave o' things."

"Ay, it's better. You canna leave a house its lane, any mair than a bairn. The ane will get into dole and mischief, as quick as the ither. You'll be minding Polly Cromarty's bit cottage, taking fire and burning to the ground, and not a man, woman, or bairn near it. And Bella Simpson the same, and Kate Dalrymple losing a' her savings, and the house locked and barr'd and naebody in it, or near it. I'll go to Aberdeen real happy if you are watching the house, while I'm awa' playing, mysel'."

So there was a week of happy preparation, and then on a fine Monday morning Mr. and Mrs. Rule-son went to Aberdeen. Margot was satisfied to leave her house in Christine's care, but at the last hour, she had discovered another likelihood of trouble. It was the herring.

CHRISTINE

"They are maistly twa weeks earlier, or later than looked for, Christine," she said, "and, of course, they'll be earlier this year. I wouldn't wonder that when we reach Aberdeen, we'll find them there, if they arena at Culraine itsel'. And if feyther's boat isna leading, it will be that meddlesome Peter Brodie's boat—and that would rile me a' the year through."

"Mither, it is too soon for the herrin'. You needna fret yoursel' anent the herrin'. If there are any signs o' the feesh, I'll gie young Donald Grant a smile, and he'll watch for them night and day to pleasure me. I'll not let Peter hae a chance to find them."

"That's a' right."

And when they were fairly gone and out o' sight, Christine sat down to consider, and to draw her personality together. She felt as if there were half-a-dozen Christines, and she was equally conscious of an unusual house. Its atmosphere was intense and restless, and slightly dissatisfied. Christine considered it for a few moments, and then said, "Nae wonder! Everything in it is tapsalterie, and I'll just go through it, and make it tidy and clean, and proper for the hame-coming."

At Aberdeen railway station they found Neil waiting for them. He took them to the house he called "home." It was a very respectable house, in a very respectable quarter of the city, kept by Mrs. Todd, a sea-captain's widow, a woman with "relatives weel

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

kent, and o' the better class o' folk." She took to Margot, and Margot, with some reservations, took to her. Ruleson was anxious to see the city. From the small window in his railway carriage his eyes had rested upon its granite towers and spires, and he went with Neil to walk down Maraschal and Union Streets, the latter being a most splendid roadway, with houses and pavements of gray granite. For a full mile's length, the street looked as if it had been cut and fashioned out of the solid rock, for the mortar used could not be seen. There were splendid shops on these streets, but there was no sign of a circus, nor of any other place of amusement.

Sitting at tea with the captain's widow, he named this fact. "I saw naething o' a circus," he said, "and a man with whom I talked a few minutes said there were no theaters or concert halls, or the like o' such places, in Aberdeen."

"Just sae," answered the widow, "we hae nae amusements here, but preaching, preaching!"

"Gudeman, why were you seeking information anent amusements? They arena in your way."

"I was just makin' a few interrogatories, Margot. I wanted to ken how the people passed their days. I didna see any sign o' manufactories. What do they mak' then in Aberdeen?"

Ruleson looked pointedly at the widow as he spoke, and she answered with an air of quiet superiority. "Aberdeen mak's men—men out o' the raw material, for a' the marts and markets o' the

CHRISTINE

world. We hae lads to be made men o' frae every part o' Scotland; for poor lads can get here the best o' learning for sma' cost. They can hae board for five shilling a week, and the professors' fees are only seven or eight pounds a session. A twenty-five-pound bursary will pay all expenses. Many of the poor students board themselves, and a great deal can be done on porridge and milk, and fish, and meal. And we hae the gentry, too, Sir! plenty of rich lads, as well as poor ones, and the one kind helps the ither."

Ruleson saw both kinds the next day—hundreds of braw young lads, running over with the joyous spirit of youth. Hard to control, yet thoroughly under control, they filled the large university hall with an almost intoxicating influence of life. You could not feel old while breathing it. Yet it all seemed very much like a church meeting to Margot, until Neil stepped to the front of the crowded platform. That sight brought her heart and soul home, and she laid her hand on her husband's hand, and sat still to listen.

He looked handsome and gentlemanly, and held a folded paper in his hand. Bowing to the professors, the provost, and the other dignitaries surrounding him, he then turned a smiling face to the audience, and commenced his speech. It was a very learned discussion on a point of law then causing international argument, and as his various points reached their climax, he was warmly applauded.

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

At its close many stood up in their enthusiasm to honor him, and in the midst of this excitement, the president of the Maraschal handed him, with the set formula, the credentials which made Neil Ruleson one of Her Majesty's gentlemen and councilors-at-law.

Neil's father sat motionless, but his grave face changed like the pages of a book which are being turned. Margot was almost hysterical. She covered her face and wept, and all eyes were turned on her, and every heart said to itself, "She will be the lad's mother." And coming out of the hall, many nodded to her and smiled. They wanted her to feel that they rejoiced with her. Outside the university, Neil joined his father and mother, and as he passed through the crowd, with his mother on his arm, he was hailed with the congratulations both of those who knew him, and those who did not know him.

It was a wonderful hour to the Ruleson party, and perhaps only James Ruleson had any shadow of regret in it. He did not once voice this regret, but it was present to his thoughts and imagination. Neil as a gentleman of Scotland and a member of the Scottish bar was a great honor, but Oh, if he had seen him in the minister's gown and bands, and heard his first sermon, how much greater his joy! How much prouder of his son's success he would have been!

But he said nothing to Margot which could dim

CHRISTINE

her satisfaction. Mrs. Todd did that quite sufficiently. She spoke with contempt o' the fool-like way Aberdeen folk went on, every time a lad happened to get a degree, or a bit o' school honor; and the thing happening a' the time, as it were. She made Margot feel by her short, cool remarks, that Neil's triumph might, after all, be an ordinary affair, and for a little season took all the glory out of Neil's achievement, though in doing so, she was careful of the reputation of her native city, and candidly admitted that in spite of a' their well-kent scholarship, Aberdeeners were kindly folk, aye ready to gie a shout o' encouragement to a new beginner.

Margot, however, quickly readjusted the dampened and discouraged feeling Mrs. Todd's opinions induced. "She's just jealous, because Neil is a Fife lad. That's a' there is to her say-so! I hae heard often that Aberdeeners were a jealous folk. I'm saying naething against their kindliness. They hae treated Neil weel, and nae doubt they understood weel enou' what they were doing."

Neil spent most of the day with his parents, but about six in the evening he came to them in full evening dress, and said he was going to the Rath's hotel. "They have a dinner in my honor," he continued, "and the Provost's son, and several important people will be there; and I am to be introduced to the Hepburn of Hepburn Braes, a great nobleman in these parts. There will be ladies, too, of course, and I am expecting a profitable and pleasant

NEIL AND A LITTLE CHILD

evening." And though Margot was quite elated over her son's great friends, Ruleson would have been far prouder had he known Neil was going to take the chair at a session of elders connected with some kirk of which Neil was the Domine.

The next morning they returned to Culrairie with hearts full of memories for which they could thank God, and they found their son Allan sitting at their fireside. As soon as Allan saw them enter, he rose and went to them, and took their hands in his hands, and said in a voice trembling with emotion, "Father! Mother! Your kindness to my little lad has made you father and mother twice over to me." Then what a happy hour followed! For as they were sitting down to their evening meal, the Domine entered. He had heard of Allan's visit and had become anxious about the child, lest he might be taken from them. And it was during these troubled hours he bethought him of the necessity for a legal adoption of little Jamie by his grandfather and himself, a plan taken into consideration that very night, and within the next three months made binding as book and bond could fix it.

The Domine was a welcome addition to the family party. He slipped with a smile into Christine's place, and she rose and served them with grace and sweetness. And as she went softly around the table, replenishing emptied plates, and refilling teacups, saying nothing, but seeing to everyone's comfort, her beauty took on an extraordinary charm. Woman, or

CHRISTINE

rather ministering angel, she seemed, and it was strange that all present took her beautiful service, as things of spiritual beauty are usually taken, without much notice. Yet she was that night the golden band around the table, that kept the sweet influences of the meal peaceful and unbroken from the beginning to the end of it. A few happy hours followed, and then the Domine took Allan back to the manse with him. "They are a' tired here," he said, "but you and I, Allan, can talk the night awa'."

This they did, but there were only two or three sentences in their long conversation which concern this story. They referred to the happy family life of the Rulesons. "I never go to your father's house, Allan," said the Domine, "without regretting that I did not marry. I have come to the conclusion that marriage is Nature's way of coaxing the best out of us. A man puts his back into the uplift for wife and children, for to make them happy is better than riches or fame."

"Still you might have made a mistake, Sir."

"Earth would be heaven, Allan, if we never made mistakes. But in spite of mistakes, men live contented with the world, and happy with each other."

CHAPTER VIII

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

The tale that I relate
This lesson seems to carry
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry.

THE little enthusiasm incident to Neil's success
did not last long, for

Joy's the shyest bird,
Mortal ever heard,
Listen rapt and silent when he sings;
Do not seek to see,
Less the vision be
But a flutter of departing wings.

And if it is not tightly clasped, and well guarded, it soon fades away, especially if doubt or question come near it. The heart, which is never weary of recalling its sorrows, seems to have no echo for its finer joys. This, however, may be our own fault. Let us remember for a moment or two how ruthlessly we transfer yesterday into today, and last week into this week. We have either no time or no inclination to entertain joys that have passed. They

CHRISTINE

are all too quickly retired from our working consciousness, to some dim, little-visited nook in our memory. And taken broadly, this is well.' Life is generally precious, according to the strength and rapidity of its flow, and change is the splendid surge of a life of this kind. A perfect life is then one full of changes. It is also a safe life, for it is because men have no changes, that they fear not God.

Now the people of this little fishing village had lives lined with change. Sudden deaths were inevitable, when life was lived on an element so full of change and peril as the great North Sea. Accidents were of daily occurrence. Loss of boats and nets reduced families to unlooked-for poverty. Sons were constantly going away to strange seas and strange countries, and others, who had been to the Arctic Ocean, or the ports of Australia, coming back home. The miracle of the son's being dead and being alive again, was not infrequently repeated. Indeed all the tragedies and joys of life found their way to this small hamlet, hidden among the rocks and sand dunes that guard the seas of Fife.

Margot's triumph was very temporary. It was not of the ordinary kind. It had in it no flavor of the sea, and the lad who had won his honors had never identified himself with the fishers of Culrairie. He did not intend to live among them, and they had a salutary fear of the law, and no love for it. As a general thing neither the men nor women of Culrairie cared whether Neil Ruleson won his degree or

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

not. Such pleasure as they felt in his success was entirely for his father's sake.

And Margot was content that it should be so. She was not heart-pleased with Neil, and not inclined to discuss his plans with her neighbors. She noticed also that Neil's father had nothing to say about his son's success, and that if the subject was introduced, it was coldly met and quickly banished.

It hurt Christine. Her life had been so intermingled with Neil's hopes and plans, she could not let them drop unnoticed from her consciousness. "Why do you say naething anent Neil, Mither?" she asked one wet morning, when the boats were in harbor, and Ruleson had gone down to the new schoolhouse.

"Weel, Christine, I hae said a' there is to say."

"Were you really disappointed, Mither?"

"In a way."

"But Neil succeeded."

"In a way."

"What way, Mither?"

"His ain way. He has been verā successful i' that way, sin' the day he was born. A wee, shrunk, puny infant he was, but he hes been a bit too much for us all—and there's seven big men in our family, forbye mysel' and Christine. Whiles I had a glimmering o' the real lad, but maistly I did the lad's way—like the rest o' us."

"You said he was kind to you and Feyther."

"He hed to be. It's a law, like the laws o' the

CHRISTINE

Medes and Persians, in Aberdeen, that lads takin' honors should pay great attention to their feythers and mithers. Some were auld and poor—far poorer than fisher-folk ever are—they had worked, and starved, and prayed for their lads, and they were going about Aberdeen streets, linked on their lads' arms, and all o' them like to cry wi' joy. Neil had to do like the lave, but I let his feyther gae his lane wi' him. I wasna carin' to mak' a show o' mysel'."

"Then you shouldna blame Neil, Mither."

"Should I not? I do, though."

"What did he do wrang?"

"He did little right, and that little he had nae pleasure in. I know! He should hae spent the evening wi' his feyther and mysel', and told us what plans he had made for the future, but he went to the Raths' and left us alane. He had promised all along to come hame wi' us, and spend a few weeks wi' the boats—your feyther is short-handed since Cluny Macpherson went awa'—and there's little doing in the law business during July and August, but he said he had an invite to the Raths' house on the Isle of Arran, and with them he has gane."

"I'm sorry, sorry, Mither."

"Sae am I, Christine, but when things hae come to 'I'm sorry,' there's nae gude left i' them."

"Do you think he is engaged to Roberta Rath?"

"I canna say. I don't think he kens himsel'."

"Did you see her?"

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

"He pointed her out to me. She was getting into a carriage, and——"

"Weel?"

"O, she was a little body; I saw naething o' her but a blue silk dress, and a white lace bonnet. It would be ordinary, nae doubt. She waved a white-gloved hand to Neil, and the lad's face was like an illumination. She seemed vera sma' and thin—just a handfu' o' her. Naething like yoursel' and our ain full-statured, weel-finished women."

"I feel as if I had lost Neil."

"You may do sae, for a man can be lost by a woman, quite as completely as by the North Sea."

Then Ruleson entered the cottage. He was wet through, but his face was red with health, and radiant with excitement. He had been in the new school-house, and seen three large boxes unpacked. "Margot! Christine!" he cried joyfully, "you'll be to come down the hill—the baith o' you—and see the wonderfu' things that hae come for ordering and plenishing o' our school. There's a round ball as big as that table, set in a frame—and it turns round, and round, and shows a' the countries and seas i' the wide world. The Maister said it was called a globe. There's maps o' Scotland, and England and a' other nations to hang on the walls, and they are painted bonnily; and there's nae end o' copy books and slates, and bundles o' pencils, and big bottles o' ink, and, Margot, I ne'er saw sae many school books i' a' my

CHRISTINE

born days. Naething has been forgotten. The maister said sae, and the Domine said sae."

"Was the Domine there?"

"Ay, was he. He and the maister unpacked the boxes. Forbye, there is three prizes for the three best scholars—the bairns will go wild o'er them."

"What are they?"

"I canna tell you. The Domine forbade me."

"You'll hae to tell me, gudeman. I'll hae nae secrets between us twa, and I'm mair than astonished at the Domine, throwing a married man into such a temptation."

"I'll go wi' you now, Feyther. I want to see the wonderfuls."

"They are locked by for today. We are going to fix the school room Monday, and hae a kind o' examination Tuesday. I hope to goodness the herrin' will keep to the nor'ard for a few days."

"Listen to your feyther, Christine! Wishing the herrin' awa' for a lot o' school bairns."

"Weel, Margot, woman, it's maist unlikely the feesh will be here for a week or mair, but they hae a will and a way o' their ain, and aince or twice, or mebbe mair than that, I hae seen them in these pairts in June."

"I think the Domine might hae notified Christine. She ought, by rights, to hae been at that unpacking."

"Weel, Margot, it cam' my way. I dinna think my lassie grudges me the pleasure."

And Christine looked at him with a smile that

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

deified her lovely face, and made Ruleson's heart thrill with pleasure.

"I wad rayther you had the pleasure than mysel', Feyther. You ken that," she said, and Ruleson laid his hand on her head, and answered: "I ken it weel! God bless thee!"

That evening, while Christine and little Jamie were busy over Jamie's lessons, Margot said to her husband, "Gudeman, I'd like to ken what prizes hae been bought. The Domine didna include me in his prohibition, or else he has less sense than I gie him credit for."

"He said I had better tell naebody."

"Ay, but you had best tell me. What classes are you givin' prizes to? It's a vera unusual thing to gie prizes. I think little o' paying bairns to learn their lessons. But they're no likely to be worth the looking at——"

"'Deed are they—vera gude indeed, for the wee bairns for whom they were bought. There are three o' them. The first is for the infant class, nane o' them over six years auld."

"Weel, what is it?"

"The Domine——"

"Says many a thing you ta' nae heed to. Just sae. You needna heed him on this point. Are not we twa one and the same? Speak out, man."

"The Domine——"

"Wha's minding the Domine here? Are you mair feared for him, than for your wife?"

CHRISTINE

Then Ruleson, with his great hearty laugh, pulled a chair to his side, and said, "Sit down, Margot. I'm mair afraid of you, than I am of any man living. I'm trem'ling wi' fear o' you, right now, and I'm just going to disobey the Domine, for your sake. What will ye gie me, if I break a promise for your sake?"

"I'll keep my promise to you, and say naething anent your transgression. What kind o' a prize could they gie to them babies i' the infant class—nane o' them five years auld? Did you see it?"

"Ay, I unpacked it."

"Was it a rattle, set wi' wee bells?"

"Naething o' the kind. It was a big doll, bonnily dressed, and a little trunk fu' o' mair claes, and a full set o' doll cheena, and a doll bed and night claes; wonderfu', complete. My goodness! Whoever gets it will be the proud wee lassie."

"Little Polly Craig will be getting it, o' course. Who chose the presents?"

"I'm thinking it was the Domine and the school-master's wife."

"Then they would be knowing wha' they were buying for?"

"That goes without the saying. I didna hear ony-one say the doll was for Polly Craig."

"Nor I, but Polly's mother hasna been to hold, nor to bind, anent the infant's progress. The hale village is weary o' the story o' Polly's remarkable intimacy wi' her alphabet and spelling. The bairn may be a' her mither says, but I'm thinking she's

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

getting her abilities too aerly to be reliable. Weel, then, who gets the next prize?"

"Willie Tamsen."

"I dinna ken the Tamsens."

"They're nice folk, from the south o' Fife. Willie is seven years auld, or thereby. He's clever, the schoolmaster says, in figures and geography, and weel-behaved, and quiet-like. The Domine says he's first in his catechism class, and vera attentive to a' that concerns his lessons—a good little lad, wi' an astonishing power o' ken in him."

"Weel, what will you gie sae remarkable a bairn?"

"A gold guinea."

"A gold guinea! I ne'er heard o' such wild extravagance. It's fair sinfu'. Whate'er will a lad o' seven years auld do wi' a guinea? Buy sweeties wi' it. I dinna think the Domine can sanction a bit o' nonsense like that."

"I'm maist sure the Domine gave the guinea out o' his ain pocket. The Tamsens are vera poor, and the laddie is the warst-dressed lad i' the village, and he is to go and get a nice suit o' claes for himsel' wi' it. The Domine knew what he was doing. The laddie will be twice as bright, when he gets claes for his little arms and legs."

"Weel, I hae naething against Willie Tamsen. He never meddled wi' my flowers, or stole my berries. I hope he'll get the claes. And there was to be three prizes?"

"Ay, one for the lads and lasses from eight to

CHRISTINE

eleven years old, that takes in a large pairt o' the school. The bigger lads and lasses will come in the autumn, when the herrin' hae been, and gane."

"I'm not asking anything anent that class. I dinna envy the schoolmaster and mistress that will hae them to manage. They'll hae their hands fu', or my name isna Margot Ruleson. Wha will get the third prize?"

"Our Jamie. And he has weel won it. Jamie isna a lad o' the common order. The Domine says he'll mak' the warld sit up and listen to him, when he comes to full stature."

"The Domine is as silly anent the bairn, as you are. After my ain lad, Neil, I'm expecting naething oot o' the Nazareth o' Culrairie. We were a' going to shout o'er Neil Ruleson—weel, we hae had our cry, and dried our eyes, and hae gane on our way again."

"Neil has done weel—considering."

"Gudeman, we hae better drop that 'consideration.' I was talking o' our Jamie. What are they going to gie our second wonder o' a bairn?"

"The maist beautiful book you ever saw—a big copy of Robinson Crusoe fu' o' pictures, and bound in blue wi' gold lettering. The bairn will hae wonder after wonder wi' it."

"Did you buy the book?"

"Not I. What mak's you ask that information?"

"Naething. Jamie should hae had something he

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

could hae halfed wi' Christine. She has spent the best o' her hours teaching the bairn. Few or nane o' the lads and lasses would hae the help o' any hame lessons. It was really Christine put Neil Ruleson among her Majesty's lawyers."

"Weel, then, she'll do her pairt in putting James Ruleson among the ministers o' the everlasting God. That will be a great honor, and pay her handsome for a' her love and labor."

"Gudeman, ministers arena honored as they were when we were young. If preaching were to go oot o' fashion, we——"

"What are you saying, Margot Ruleson? The preacher's license is to the 'end o' the world.' The Word o' the Lord must be gien to men, as long as men people the earth."

"Vera weel! The Word o' the Lord is in everybody's hands the now; and everyone is being taught to read it. Maist folk can read it as weel as the minister."

"The Word must be made flesh! Nae book can tak' the place o' the face-to-face argument. Preaching will last as long as men live."

"Weel, weel, I'm not going to get you to arguing. You arena in the clubroom, and I'm too tired to go into speculations wi' you. I'm obliged to you, gudeman, for the information you hae imparted. I wad, however, advise the Domine to gie his next secret into the keeping o' some woman, say mysel'. Women arena sae amiable as men, and whiles they

CHRISTINE

can keep a secret, which is a thing impossible to men-folk."

"If they are married, I'll admit there are difficulties."

"Gude night, and gude dreams to you, James Ruleson."

"Ye ken weel, Margot, that I never dream."

"Sae you lose the half o' your life, James. I'm sorry for you. I shall dream o' the three happy bairns, and their prizes. Say, you might hae picked out another lassie; twa lads to one lass is o'erganging what's fair. I'm awa' to sleep—you needna answer."

It was trying to the village that Sabbath had to come and go, before the school examination. But everything waited for arrives in its time. And this was a Monday worth waiting for. It was a perfect June day, and the sea, and the sun, and the wind held rejoicing with the green earth and the mortals on it. If there was envy, or jealousy, or bad temper among the villagers, they forgot it, or put it aside for future consideration. Everyone was in his best clothes, the boys and girls being mostly in white, and the little place looked as if there were a great wedding on hand. Christine had made an attempt to decorate the room a little. The boys cut larch boughs and trailing branches, the men loaned the flags of the boats, the women gave the few flowers from their window pots, and strips of garden, and Margot, a little sadly, cut her roses, and gave permission to

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

Christine to add to them a few laburnum branches, now drooping with their golden blossoms.

The room looked well. The flowers and the flags did not hide the globe and the maps. And the black-board kept its look of authority, though a branch of laburnum bent over it. The schoolmaster was playing a merry Fantasia as the company gathered, but at a given signal from Christine he suddenly changed it to the children's marching song, and the rapid, orderly manner in which it led each class to its place was a wonderful sight to the men and women who had never seen children trained to obedience by music.

The Domine opened the examination by reading, in the intense silence that followed the cessation of the music, three verses from the eighteenth chapter of St. Luke:

"And they brought unto him infants that he would touch them, but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein.' "

Then the schoolmistress touched a hand bell and a crowd of little children, none over five years old, gathered round her. Contrary to the usual practice of children, their behavior and recitals were better

CHRISTINE

than usual, and laughter and hand-clapping followed all their simple efforts. Polly Craig was their evident leader, and when she had told a charming story about a little girl who would do what she ought not to do, the records of the class were read by the Domine, and the prize awarded to Polly.

Willie Tamsen and Jamie Ruleson's classes were treated in a similar way, and were equally successful in their recitations and equally delighted with their gifts. Now, the real joy in giving gifts is found in giving them to children, for the child heart beats long after we think it has outgrown itself. The perfect charm of this gathering lay in the fact that men and women became for a few hours little children again. It was really a wonderful thing to see the half-grown girls, the married women, and even old Judith Macpherson, crowding round Polly to admire the waxen beauty and the long fair curls of her prize doll.

After the school exercises the adults slowly scattered, sauntering home with their wives, and carrying their babies as proudly as Polly carried her new treasure. Truly both men and women receive the kingdom of God and Love, when they become as little children. The children remained for two hours longer in the school room. For the entertainment of their parents the youngest ones had danced some of those new dances just at that period introduced into Scotland, called polkas and mazurkas, and now, to please themselves, they began a series of those

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

mythic games which children played in the world's infancy, and which, thank God, have not yet perished from off the face of the earth. "How many miles to Babylon?" "Hide and seek," "In and out," "Blind man's buff," and so forth, and in this part of the entertainment, everything and everyone depended upon Christine. Mothers, going home, called to her, "Christine, look after my bairn," and then went contentedly away.

They might contentedly do so, for whoever saw Christine Ruleson that afternoon, in the midst of those forty or fifty children, saw something as near to a vision of angels, as they were likely to see on this earth. She stood among them like some divine mother. A little one three years old was on her right arm. It pulled her earrings, and rumbled her hair, and crushed her lace collar, and she only kissed and held it closer. A little lad with a crooked spine, and the seraphic face which generally distinguishes such sufferers, held her tightly by her right hand. Others clung to her dress, and called her name in every key of love and trust. She directed their games, and settled their disputes, and if anything went wrong, put it right with a kiss.

The Domine watched her for ten or fifteen minutes, then he went slowly up the hill. "Where at a' is Christine, Domine?" asked Margot. "I'm wanting her sairly."

"Christine is too busy to meddle with, Margot. She's doing God's best work—ministering to little

CHRISTINE

children. As I saw her half-an-hour ago, she was little lower than the angels. I'm doubting if an angel could be lovelier, or fuller of life and love, and every sweet influence."

"Christine is a handsome lass, nae doubt o' that, but our women are all o' them heritage handsome. I'm doubting if Eve, being a Jewess, could be worth evening wi' us."

"Eve was not a Jewess. She was God's eldest daughter, Margot."

"Then God's eldest daughter *hasna* a very gude character. She has been badly spoken of, ever since the warld began. And I do hope my Christine will behave hersel' better than Eve did—if all's true that is said anent her."

"Christine is a good girl, Margot. If little children love a woman, and she loves them, the love of God is there. Margot! Margot! God comes to us in many ways, but the sweetest and tenderest of all of them, is when he sends Jesus Christ by the way of the cradle."

All's well that ends well. If this be true, the first session of Culrairie school was a great success. It had brought an entirely new, and very happy estimate of a father's and a mother's duty to their children. It had even made them emulous of each other, in their care and attention to the highest wants of childhood.

The whole village was yet talking of the examination when the herring came. Then every woman

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

went gladly to her appointed post and work, and every man—rested and eager for labor—hailed the news with a shout of welcome. Peter Brodie's big Sam brought it very early one lovely summer morning, and having anchored his boat, ran through the sleeping village shouting—"Caller Herrin'! In Culrairie Bay!"

The call was an enchantment. It rang like a trumpet through the sleeping village, and windows were thrown up, and doors flung open, and half-dressed men were demanding in stentorian voices, "Where are the fish, Sam?"

"Outside Culrairie Bay," he answered, still keeping up his exultant cry of "Caller Herrin'!" and in less than half an hour men were at work preparing for the amazing physical strain before them. Much was to do if they were to cast their nets that evening, and the streets were soon busy with men and lads carrying nets and other necessities to the boats. It was up with the flag on every boat in commission, for the fishing, and this day's last preparations excited the place as if it were some great national holiday. The women were equally full of joyful business. They had to cook the breakfast, but immediately after it were all in the packing and curing sheds. You would have been sure they were keeping holiday. Pleasant greetings, snatches of song, encouraging cries to the men struggling down to the boats with the leaded nets, shouts of hurry to the bewildered children, little flytings at their delays, O twenty different motives

CHRISTINE

for clamor and haste were rife, and not unpleasant, because through all there was that tone of equal interest and good fellowship that can never be mistaken.

Margot had insisted on a visit to her special shed, to see whether all was in readiness for her special labor, but Christine had entreated her to wait for her return from the town, where she was going for orders. She had left her mother with the clear understanding that she would not risk the walk and the chatter and the clatter until the following day. But as soon as she was alone, Margot changed her intentions. "I must make the effort," she said to herself. "I'm feared of the pain, that's all about it." So she made the effort, and found out that there was something more than fear to be reckoned with.

Christine brought home astonishing orders, and Margot's face flushed with pride and energy. "I'll not let that order slip through my fingers," she cried, "I'm going to the kippering, and what I canna do, Christine can manage, following my say-so."

This change in Margot's work was the only shadow on that year's herring-tide. It was a change, however, that all felt would not be removed. Margot said, with a little laugh, that she was teaching her lassie how to make a living, or how to help some gudeman to do it. "And I have a fine scholar," she soon began to add. "Christine can now kipper a herring as weel as her mother, and why not? She

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

has seen the kippering done, ever since she wore ankle tights."

"And you will be glad of a bit rest to yourself, Margot, no doubt," was the general answer.

"Ay, I have turned the corner of womanhood, and I'm wearing away down the hillside of life. I ha'e been in a dowie and desponding condition for a year or mair."

"Christine is clever with business, and folks do say she has a full sense of the value of money."

"To be sure, Nancy. There's no harm in the like of that. Her feyther came from Aberdeen folk, and it's weel recognized that Aberdeen folk look at both sides of a penny."

"Christine is a clever lass, and good likewise, we were all saying that, a while ago."

"Weel, some folk, out of bad taste, or a natural want of good sense, may think different; but there—that's enough on the subject of Christine. Her feyther is gey touchy anent Christine, and it will be as weel to let that subject alone."

So, day after day, Margot sat in a chair at her daughter's side, and Christine filled the big orders as her mother instructed her. And they were well filled, in good time, and the outcome was beyond all expectation. Yet Christine looked sadly at the money, and Margot turned her head away, to hide the unbidden tears in her eyes, as she said:

"It's all yours, lassie. I'll not touch a farthing of it. You have fairly won it. It will happen help

CHRISTINE

Neil's deficiencies. Oh, my dear lassie! Mither has done her last kippering! I feel it."

"Then I'll kipper for you, Mither, as long as we both live. The hill is now o'er much for you—and the noisy women, and skirling bairns! Christine will go to Mother's shed, and Mother will bide at hame, and red up the house, and have a cup of tea ready for hungry folk, as they come weary hame."

And Margot let it go at that, but she was as she said, "dowie and despondent." Ruleson begged her to go with him to Edinburgh, and get the advice of a good physician, but Margot would not listen to any entreaty.

"I'll no do any such thing," she answered. "Not likely! The Domine can gie the pain a setback, and if God wants me here, He'll keep me here, sick or well, and if He doesna want me here, I'm willing to go where He does want me." From this position Margot was not movable, and now that the herring fishing was over, there did not appear to be any reason for making her restless and unhappy. So she naturally drifted into that household position, where everyone took care not to tire, and not to vex, grandmother.

One morning in the early days of October, Christine was sitting sewing, and Margot was making shortcake. They had been talking of Neil and wondering where he was.

"I'm thinking it is whole o' a month, since we heard from the lad," said Margot.

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

"I dare say it's mair, Mother; and that letter was from some strange French seaside place, and he was thinking that they wouldna stay there very long. He has mebbe gane further awa' than France."

"I wouldn't wonder—setting a young man traveling is like setting a ball rolling down a hill. Baith o' them are hard to turn back."

Margot had scarcely finished speaking, when Sam Brodie opened the door. He had been to the town post office and seen, in the list of uncalled-for letters, a letter addressed to Christine, so he had brought it along. It proved to be from Neil, and had been posted in Rome. Christine was familiar with that postmark, and it still had power at least to raise her curiosity. Neil's handwriting, however, spoke for itself, and before she broke the seal, she said, "Why, Mither! It is from Neil."

"I thought that, as soon as Sam came in. I was dreaming of a letter from Neil, last night. I dinna dream for naething. Make haste with the news—good or bad—read it all. I want to hear the warst of it. Then Christine read aloud the following letter:

DEAR CHRISTINE,

I want you to tell Mother that I married Miss Rath in Paris on the fifth of September ult. We were afraid that Reginald was going to interfere, so we settled the matter to prevent quarreling—which, you know, is against my

CHRISTINE

nature. Reginald's opposition was quite unlooked for and, I must say, very ill-natured and discouraging. If there is anything in a man's life he should have full liberty and sympathy in, it is his marriage. I dare say Mother will have some complaint or other to make. You must talk to her, until she sees things reasonably. We were married in the Protestant Episcopal Church in Paris, very quietly—only the necessary witnesses—and came on here at once. I disapproved so highly of Reginald's behavior at this important period of my life, and of some insulting things he said to me, that I have resolved not to have any more relations with him. After all I have done for him, it is most disheartening. My wife feels her brother's conduct very much, but she has perfect trust in me. Of course, if I had been married in Scotland, I would have had my friends' presence, but I am quite sure that my best interests demanded an immediate marriage. We shall be home in a month, and then I propose to open a law office in Glasgow *in my own name*. I shall do better without impedimenta like Reginald Rath. I trust to you to make all comfortable at home. I shall desire to bring my wife to see my mother. I am proud of Roberta. She is stylish, and has a good deal more money than I expected. I shall not require Reginald's money or patronage, they would now be offensive to my sense of honor and freedom. Give my love to my father and mother, and remember I am

Always your loving brother,

NEIL.

There was a few moments' dead silence, and Christine did not lift her eyes from the paper in her hand, until a passionate exclamation from Margot demanded her notice.

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

"Oh, Mither, Mither!" she cried, "dinna mak' yoursel' sick; it's Neil, our Neil, that you are calling a scoundrel."

"And I'll call a scoundrel by no ither name. It's gude enough for him."

"We were talking one hour ago about him marrying Miss Rath, and you took to the idea then. Now that he has done so, what for are you railing at him?"

"I'm not railing at him for marrying the lass, she's doubtless better than he deserves. It's the way that he's done the business—the mean, blackguardly way he's done the business, that shames and angers me. Dod! I would strike him on the face, if he was near my hand. I'm shamed o' him! He's a black disgrace to his father and mother, and to all the kind he came from."

"Generally speaking, Mother, folks would say that Neil had done weel to himsel' and praise him for it."

"Who are you alluding to? Dinna call the name 'Neil' in my hearing. Scoundrel is gude enough to specify a scoundrel. I hae counts against him, and he must clear himself, before I'll pass his christened name o'er my lips."

"What are your counts against him? Maybe I can speak a word to explain them."

"Not you! First, he has, beyond a' doubt, deceived the lass's brother. He should hae spoken to him first of all, and the young man wouldna hae said

CHRISTINE

insulting words if there wasna cause for the same."

"The lady was of full age, and sae had the right to please herself, Mither."

"She had not. She was as bad as Neil, or she would have sought her brother's consent."

"Perhaps Neil wouldna let her tell her brither."

"That's like enough. He has got the girl, and that means he has got full control o' her money. Then he breaks his promise to go into partnership in business with the brother, and will open a law office in his ain name! He'll open it, ye ken, wi' the Rath siller, in his ain name! Having got plenty o' the Rath siller to set himsel' up, he drops the man whom he used to fleech and flatter enou' to sicken a honest man. And he trusts to you to mak' all comfortable here—but no word or whisper anent the ninety pounds he's owing you. He has gotten mair money than he expectit wi' his stolen wife, and yet he hasna a thought for the sister wha emptied the small savings o' her lifetime into his unthankfu' hands. Wae's me, but I'm the sorrowfu' mither this day."

"For a' that, Mither, dinna mak' yoursel' sick. Luck o' some kind threw the Rath siller in Neil's way."

"Ay, and the scoundrel has ta'en all he could get o' it."

"That's the way o' the warld, Mother."

"It isn't the way o' honest, honorable men. He ought to hae spoken to the young man plainly, and

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

he ought not to hae quarreled wi' him anent their business proposal. I understand that the Rath lad was na very knowing in the law nor indeed notable for managing his ain affairs, in any way."

"Weel, Mither, it comes to this—Neil had made up his mind to tak' his living out o' the Rath purse, and he finally decided that he would rayther tak' it from the lady, than the gentleman."

Margot laughed at this remark. "You'll not be far wrang in that observe, Christine," she said, "but the lad may be far out o' his reckoning, and I'm not carin' if it be so. Nae doubt he thought the lassie wad be easier controlled than her brither, who, I was led to believe, had a vera uncertain temper. Roberta may pay a' our wrangs yet. Little women are gey often perfect Tartars."

"Mither! Mither! You wouldn't wish your ain lad to marry a Tartar o' a wife, and sae be miserable."

"Wouldn't I? A stranger winning their way wi' the Rath's siller, wouldna hae troubled me, it would hae been out o' my concern. Christine, there are two things no good woman likes to do. One is to bring a fool into the warld, and the other is to bring one o' them clever fellows, who live on other people's money, instead o' working their way up, step by step. I'm shamed o' my motherhood this day!"

"Na, na, Mither! Think of Norman, and Allan, and the lave o' the lads!"

CHRISTINE

"And forbye, I think shame o' any son o' mine being married in a foreign country, in France itsel', the French being our natural enemies."

"Not just now, Mither, not just now."

"Our natural enemies! and a kind o' people, that dinna even speak like Christians. Ye ken I hae heard their language in this vera room, Christine, and sorry I am to hae permitted the like."

"There's nae harm in it, Mither."

"It led him astray. If Ruleson's lad hadna kent the French tongue, he would hae persuaded thae Raths that America was the only place to see the world in."

"Well, Mither, he went to the English church in France—the Protestant Episcopal Church!"

"Another great wrang to our family. The Rulesons are of the best Covenanting stock. What would John Knox say to a Ruleson being married in an Episcopal Church, at the very horns o' the altar, as it were? An unchristened Turk could do naething more unfitting."

"Mither, I hear feyther and Jamie coming up the hill. Let us hae peace this night. We will tak' counsel o' our pillows, and in the morning we'll see things in a different way, perhaps."

"Perhaps!"

And the scorn Margot threw into the seven letters of that one word, "perhaps," would have been an impossibility to any woman less ignorant, or less prejudiced in favor of her own creed and traditions.

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

For it is in Ignorance that Faith finds its most invincible stronghold.

Ruleson came in with a newspaper in his hand. Jamie was with him, but as soon as he entered the cottage, he snuggled up to his grandmother, and told her softly, "Grandfather has had some bad news. It came in a newspaper."

Grandfather, however, said not a word concerning bad news, until he had had his tea, and smoked a pipe. Then Christine and Jamie went to Christine's room to read, and Ruleson, after tapping the bowl of his pipe on the hob until it was clean, turned to Margot, and said, "Gudewife, I hae news today o' Neil's marriage to Miss Rath."

"Ay, Christine had a letter."

"What do you think o' the circumstance?"

"I'm wondering, when it was in a foreign country, and outside his ain kirk and creed, whether it was legal and lawful?"

"Neil is lawyer enough to ken he was all right. It is not the law side o' the question I am thinking of. It is the hame side. Not a word to his ain folk, and not one o' us present at the ceremony!"

"Neither were any of the lady's family present. It was, I'm thinking, a marriage after Neil Ruleson's ain heart. Neil first, and last, and altogether."

"How's that? The young man, her brother——"

"Neil has quarreled wi' him. Neil has got the lady and her money, and he is going to begin business in his ain name, exclusive! I consider Neil

CHRISTINE

something o' a scoundrel, and a mean one, at that."

"I was talking to Finlay anent the matter, and he says Neil has done weel to himsel', and he thinks him a gey clever young man."

"And I'd like to have Finlay keep his false tongue out o' my family affairs. I say Neil has done a dirty piece o' business with the Rathes, and that will be seen, and heard tell o'."

"As I was saying, Margot, it is the hame side o' the affair that gave me a shock. To think of a' we hae done, of a' his brithers hae done, and of the siller he got frae his sister! To think o' it! Only to think o' it! And not ane o' us bid to his wedding. It fairly staggers me!"

"Nae wonder, gudeman! It's an unspeakable business! I'll not talk o' it! The lad I nursed on my heart, and he's fairly broken it at last. He's a sinful creature!"

"We are all o' us sinfu' creatures, Margot!"

"We are not. You are much mista'en, James. There's plenty o' good men and women on every side o' us. Neither you, nor mysel', would do as Neil has done."

"Perhaps not—but we baith hae our ain way o' sinning, Margot, you ken that."

"Speak for yoursel', gudeman!"

"Finlay said——"

"Kay! Kay! I'll no be fashed wi' Finlay's foolishness. I'm awa' to my sleep. My lad, my dear lad, you are heart-weary. I'm sorry for you."

AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

"Wait a moment, Margot. Finlay says he has nae doubt Neil has married ten thousand pounds a year. Think o' that!"

"I'll think of nae such foolishness. And if it was twenty thousand, the lad would need it all—we hae brought him up sae badly!"

Margot disappeared with the words, and the unhappy father as he covered the fire, and pottered about the house, said sorrowfully:

"She's right! She's always right. If her words are in the way o' reproach, it's my fault! James Ruleson's fault! I ought to hae stood out against the Maraschal. If we had made him a minister, he would hae been obligated to set an example to a kirkful o' men and women, and folks will sin against their ain house, when they will do their duty to a kirkful."

CHAPTER IX

'A' HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

The dead sailor,
Has peace that none may gain who live;
'And rest about him, that no love can give,
And over him, while life and death shall be,
The light and sound, and darkness of the sea!

THE winter following Neil's marriage was a pleasant one to the village of Culrairie. The weather was favorable, the line fishing more than usually prosperous, and the school remarkably successful. Ruleson took the greatest delight in its progress, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than a walk in its vicinity, when he could see the children coming and going, with their books and balls in their hands. They all knew him, but however large the group in the playground, he could pick little Jamie out of it in a moment. And oh, how good it was to see the old man defying his failure with Neil, and building still grander hopes on this lad of ten years old! Truly, from the good heart Hope springs eternal. It forgets that it is mortal, because it takes hold on immortality.

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

Christine heard constantly from Cluny, but it was nearly a year since she had seen him, for the crew of a passenger steamer trading to foreign ports, do not obtain leave easily, especially in their first year. And Cluny had never been in Glasgow port long enough to make a journey to Culrairie and back possible. Christine did not fret herself because of his absence. She was not as one of the foolish ones, who regard a lover and love-making as the great essential of life. She had proved in her own case, that Duty was far above, and beyond Love. She had known cases where Honor had been put before Love. She had seen Angus Ballister put mere social caste before Love. It was a fact known to all the world, that gold laughed at Love, and bought and sold Love, as if he were merchandise in the market place.

She loved Cluny, but her love was subject to her duty, which at present was evidently in her own home. Her father was strong and full of the joy of living, but his work was on the winter seas, and he needed the comfort of a well-ordered house and properly-cooked food after his hard day's fishing. Her mother was sick and failing, and it appeared to Christine's anxious heart that she was losing, instead of gaining, ground. Margot denied this position, but Christine noticed that one little household duty after another was allowed to drift quietly into her hands. Then also there was Jamie, whom she tenderly loved, and who was wholly dependent on her

CHRISTINE

care and help. His food—his clothes—his lessons! What could Jamie do without her?

One morning in February, she had a letter from Cluny, which set at naught all these claims. He had two hundred pounds in the Bank of Scotland, and he wanted to get married. He was studying navigation, and he would be third officer in another year. He was fairly wasting his life without Christine. He was growing old with the disappointment he was getting constantly. He was next door to dying, with one put-off after another. If he came up on the fifteenth, would she walk over to the Domine's with him? He felt as if the Domine might bury him, if he didna marry him. He declared he had been sick with the love and pain of wanting her, ever since he could remember himself, "and yet, Christine," he wrote, "you are mine. Mine from your birth hour. Mine whether you love me, or don't love me. Mine if you marry someone else. Mine even if you die, for then I would soon follow, and find you out, wherever you were."

What was a girl of cool, reasonable nature, to do with a lover of this impetuous, vehement temper?

She told her mother that Cluny was coming, and she noticed that the news instantly changed the atmosphere of the room. Margot had been sewing and chatting cheerfully in her chair by the fireside. She dropped her work, and became thoughtful and silent. Christine knew why, and she said to herself, "Mither is fearing I am going to marry Cluny, and

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

leave her alane! As if I would! The man never lived, who could make me do the like o' that." She waited ten minutes to give Margot time to recover herself, but as she did not do so, she asked, "Mither, are you doubting Christine?"

"No, dearie! I couldna do that."

"What then?"

"I'm doubting mysel'. Doubting my power to look to your feyther's comfort, and the like o' that, and maybe fearing a strange woman in the house."

"Why a strange woman?"

"There's things I canna do now—things I havna the strength for, and——"

"You think that Christine would leave you?"

"Weel, there is the peradventure."

"Mither, put your arm round me. To the end of your life, Christine will put hers round you. Naebody can part us twa. Naebody!"

"I thought Cluny was coming—and—that——"

"I would leave you. Leave you now! Leave you, and leave feyther without anyone to cook his meals, and leave wee Jamie, who looks to me as if I was his Mither. Na, na! You mustna judge Christine in that way. What for would I leave you? Because a lad loves me out of a' sense and reason. Even if I was his wife, love and duty would count your claim first. God said a man should leave feyther and mither, and cleave to his wife; but He didna tell a woman to leave her feyther and mither, and cleave to her husband."

CHRISTINE

"He would mean it, Christine."

"Then He would hae said it. He leaves nae room to question."

"There might be what is called 'inferences.' "

"Na, na, Mither! It is thus and so, and do, and do not, wi' God. There's nae inferences in any o' His commands. When folks break them, they ken well they are breaking them. But what will we be talking o' this matter for? You yoursel' are beyond the obligation."

"I ne'er had it, I may say, for my feyther was drowned ere I was born, and my mither died ere I was five years old. It's different wi' you, dearie."

"It is, but Christine kens all o' her duty, and it will be her pleasure to fulfill it." And she clasped her mother's hands in hers, and kissed her. And Margot's old pawky smile flitted o'er her face, and she said, "We must ask the Domine anent this question"—then a little sarcastically—"or Neil will gie us the Common Law o' Scotland concerning it."

So the trouble ended with a smile and the shout of Jamie as he flung open the house door, in a storm of hurry and pleasure. "Auntie! Grandmither!" he cried. "We are going to have a tug-of-war between the English and the Scotch, on the playground, at half-past twelve. I'm on the Scotch side. Gie me my dinner, Auntie, and I'll be awa' to help floor Geordie Kent, and the rest of his upsetting crowd. Geordie's mither is English, and he's always boasting about the circumstance."

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

"Are you going to tak' the brag out o' him, Jamie?"

"I am going to help do so, with all my might, but there's some Border lads among the English set, and they are a hefty lot, and hard to beat."

"That's right, Jamie! Fife lads shout when the boat wins the harbor, not till then. All the same, laddie, bring me word o' your victory."

When dinner was over Christine dressed herself for her visitor, and the light of love and expectation gave to her face an unusual beauty. She wore her fisher costume, for she thought Cluny would like it best, but it was fresh and bright and quite coquettish, with its pretty fluted cap, its gold earrings, its sky-blue bodice and skirt of blue and yellow stripes, and the little kerchief of vivid scarlet round her shoulders. Its final bit of vanity was a small white muslin apron, with little pockets finished off with bows of scarlet ribbon. If she had dressed herself for a fashionable masquerade ball she would have been its most picturesque belle and beauty.

It was seven o'clock when Cluny arrived. Ruleson had gone to a meeting of the School Trustees, a business, in his opinion, of the very greatest importance; and Margot's womanly, motherly sense told her that Cluny would rather have her absence than her company. So she had pleaded weariness, and gone to her room soon after tea was over, and Cluny had "the fair opportunity," he so often declared he never obtained; for Margot had said to Jamie, "You'll

CHRISTINE

come and sit wi' me, laddie, and gie me the full story o' your bloody defeat, and we'll mak' a consultation anent the best way o' mending it."

"This is glorious!" cried Cluny, as he stood alone with Christine in the firelit room. "I have you all to mysel'! Oh, you woman of all the world, what have you to say to me this night?"

"What do you want me to say, Cluny?"

"Tell me that you'll go before the Domine with me, in the morning."

"Now, Cluny, if you are going to begin that trouble again, I will not stay with you."

"Trouble, trouble? What trouble? Is it a trouble to be my wife?"

"I have told you before, I could not marry you till the right time came."

"It is the right time now! It has to be! I'll wait no longer!"

"You will wait forever, if you talk that way to me."

"I'll take my ain life, Christine, rayther than hae it crumbled awa' between your cruel fingers and lips! aye writing, and saying, 'at the proper time'! God help me! When is the proper time?"

"When my mither is better, and able to care for hersel', and look after feyther and the house."

"Is she any better than she was?"

"Na, I'm feared she is worse."

"She is maybe dying."

"I am feared she is."

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

"Then if I wait till she dies——"

"Be quiet, Cluny! How dare you calculate anything for my life, on my mither's death? Do you think I would walk from her grave to the altar to marry you? I would hae to lose every gude sense, and every good feeling I have, ere I could be sae wicked."

"Do you mean that after your mither's death, you will still keep me waiting?"

"You know right well, Cluny, what our folk would say, if I didna observe the set time of mourning."

"Great Scot! That's a full year!"

"Ay. If a bairn dies in our village, its folk wear blacks for a year. Would I grudge a year's respect for my mither's memory? Forbye there would be my poor heartbroken feyther, and a' his needs and griefs."

"And the bairn, too, I suppose?"

"Ay, you're right. The bairn is in our keeping, till he is fourteen. Then he goes to Domine Trenaby."

"I hope the next storm will mak' an end o' me! I'm a broke man, in every worth-while. I hae money to mak' a home, but I canna hae a home without a wife, and the wife promised me puts one mountain after another in the way, that no man can win over"—and he passionately clasped and unclasped his hands, while tears, unrecognized, flowed freely, and somewhat relieved the heart tension that for a few moments made him speechless.

It seems natural for a woman to weep, but it sends

CHRISTINE

a thrill of pity and fear through a woman's heart to see a man break down in unconscious and ungovernable weeping. Christine was shocked and strangely pitiful. She soothed, and kissed, and comforted him, with a gracious abandon she had never before shown. She could not alter circumstances, but she strengthened him for the bearing of them. She actually made him confess that she would lose something in his estimation, if she was capable of leaving her mother under present conditions. In his embrace she wept with him, and both of them learned that night the full sweetness of a love that is watered with mutual tears.

So, at the last, she made him strong and confident in hopes for the future, because God is love, and the circumstances that separated them were of His ordering. And Christine would think no ill of God, she was sure that life and death, and all things God ordained, were divinely good; and her influence over-arched and enveloped Cluny, and perhaps for the first time, the real meaning of life and its difficulties pealed through his heart and brain.

Then as they were talking, Ruleson returned, and Ruleson, liking Cluny well, was rejoiced to see him, and they talked together with the greatest interest, while Christine placed upon the table the simple luxuries she had prepared for this anticipated meal. It was indeed a wonderfully happy meal, prolonged by interesting conversation till nearly midnight, for Ruleson wanted to hear all Cluny could tell about

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

the Mediterranean, and Cluny was pleased to listen to Ruleson's enthusiastic description of the good work the school was doing.

When Cluny at length rose to depart, Ruleson asked the date of his ship's next visit to Glasgow, and then promised to meet him there, and to bring Christine with him for a two or three days' pleasuring. Cluny was delighted, for though Christine only shook her head and smiled, he believed that in some way or other the visit could be managed. And Margot was enthusiastic about it. She said Christine must ask Faith to come and stay with her, and Norman would come to her through the night in case of trouble, and the Domine would call and see her, and wee Jamie was comfort and help baith. "Forbye," she added, "I'm wanting to hear a' about Neil and his wife, and their way o' living, Christine, and if you'll just make them an hour's passing call, you can gie me a vera clear idea o' the same."

So the hastily projected trip became an anticipatory pleasure for which there was constant preparation going on. It was a wonderful prospect to Christine, who had never been five miles from her home, and Margot entered heartily into the scheme for making it a notable affair. She said the time was a lucky ordering, for it was near enough Easter to warrant a new spring suit, and she gave Christine a five-pound note, and sent her into the town to buy one. "You'll get your ain choice, lassie," she said, "but I'm thinking, if it should be o' a light pearly-gray, it would

CHRISTINE

suit you weel, and get your gloves and parasol o' the same shade, as near as may be, but buy your bonnet in Glasgow town, for you will hae the height o' the fashion there, and scores o' shops to choose from."

So for nearly a month this pleasant expectation kept the Ruleson cottage busy and happy. Christine's pearly-gray cashmere dress came home, and was greatly admired, even by the Domine, who also took a great interest in the proposed visit to Glasgow. He advised her to send Neil word, as soon as she arrived there:

"And do as you have always done, Christine, strive for peace and family unity. There have been wrongs, no doubt, but you Rulesons have all nursed one mother's breast, and learned your prayers at one mother's knees, so if there is any little trouble between Neil and yourself, Christine, forgive it."

"I love Neil, I hae loved him all my life, Sir. I intend to go on loving him. Ninety pounds could not part us. No, nor ninety hundred pounds. There's no money's-worth, can count love's-worth."

How does a young girl feel on the eve of her first pleasure journey, when she has pretty new clothing to wear, and money enough to spend, and is going in the care of an indulgent father to have fresh and unknown entertainments, with a lover who adores her, and whom she admires and truly loves? Is she not happy and joyous, and full of eager anticipation? And it was the last day of waiting. The valise which held her new dress and her father's best suit,

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

was packed, Faith had readily taken hold of the house duties, and Margot had been, and was, unusually well and active. Ruleson had gone fishing "to pass the time," he said, and all was ready for the early start they proposed to make in the morning.

Ruleson generally came home in time for his six o'clock meal, but Christine, standing at the open door about four o'clock, saw him making for the harbor. "Father's just like a bairn," she thought. "I'm gey uplifted mysel', but I'm plum steady, to what he is." Then Margot joined her. "Is that your feyther coming, Christine?"

"Ay, it's feyther, sure enou'!"

"What for is he coming at this time o' day?"

"He's just in a wave o' excitement, he isna heeding what the clock says."

"What time is it?"

"Not quite four."

"Weel, you hed better put on the kettle; he's used to eating as soon as he comes hame, and if his head is wrang anent the time, his stomach is doubtless wrang anent its eating."

So the women went inside, and Christine put on the kettle, and Margot began to lay the cloth, and set the china on the table. It took Ruleson about half an hour to walk between his boat and his house, but suddenly Margot noticed that he was overdue, and yet not in sight. She called Christine, and they stood together at the land side door, and watched

CHRISTINE

for him. A sudden silence fell between them, they stopped wondering about his delay, and kept their eyes on the road. The time seemed to stand still. Margot went into the house and sat down. Christine's life seemed to be in her eyes. Every minute was like an hour. "Feyther, Feyther!" she said in an anxious whisper. "Whatna for are you delaying? What at all is keeping you? Come, Feyther!" And to this strong cry of the Inner Woman, he turned a corner, and was in full view.

Christine saw in a moment that something was wrong. "He isna walking like himsel'! He must hae got hurt some way or ither!" and she ran like a deer to meet him.

"Feyther! Feyther! Whatever's ailing you?"

He stood still and looked at her, and she was shocked at his appearance.

"Have you hurt yoursel', Feyther?"

"Something has hurt me. I hae taken a sair cold and shivering. I am ill, lassie. I maun hae a doctor as soon as maybe. I am in a hot and cauld misery. I can hardly draw a breath."

Margot met them at the door. "Feyther is ill, Mither! Where's Jamie? He will run and tell the Domine. Get feyther into his bed, and if I canna find Jamie, I'll away mysel' for the Domine. Perhaps I had better go to the town for Doctor Fraser."

"Feyther says no! He wants to see the Domine, particular."

"Then I'll waste no time seeking Jamie. I'll go

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

mysel' to the manse, and I'll be back as quick as possible. Keep a brave heart, Mither. There's only you, till I get back."

Happily she found the Domine more than half-way on his road to Ruleson's. He said he had had a feeling an hour ago, that he was wanted there, and he was angry with himself for not obeying the word given him. Then he took Christine's hand, and they went hurriedly and in silence to the sick man.

"My friend! My dear friend!" he said as he clasped Ruleson's hot hand and listened to his labored breathing, "I am going as fast as I can for Fraser. This is a trouble beyond my skill, and we want you well for the Easter school exercises. The bairns willna be happy missing you. So I'll go quick as I can for Fraser. Then turning to Margot, he said, "Where is Faith Anderson? I thought she was with you."

"She is, but she went to the village to see some o' her auld friends. She said she would be back by nine o'clock."

"And Jamie? He could go wi' me."

"Faith took Jamie wi' her."

Then he went away, and Margot and Christine stood helplessly beside the suffering man. It grew dark, and no one came, and Christine felt as if she was in some dreadful dream, and could not awaken herself. They expected Norman about seven, but something detained him, and it was after nine when Faith and Jamie were heard on the hill. They were

CHRISTINE

laughing and talking noisily, and Christine ran to meet, and to silence them. The sick man was growing rapidly worse, and there was no sign of the Domine and the doctor. Indeed it was near midnight when they arrived, and by this time Ruleson was unconscious.

Those who know anything of pneumonia will understand the hard, cruel fight that a man in the perfect health and strength of James Ruleson made for his life. Every step of the disease was contested, and it was only when his wonderful resistance gave out, and his strength failed him, that the doctor and the Domine lost hope. At length, one sunny afternoon, the Domine drew up the window shade, and let the light fall on the still, white face for a minute. Christine was at his side, and he turned to her, and said, "I am going back to the manse for the Blessed Cup of Remembrance. Get the table and bread ready, and tell your mother it is the last time! She must try and eat it with him."

Christine looked at him with her soul in her eyes. She understood all he meant and she merely bowed her head and turned to the dying man. He lay as still as a cradled child. The struggle was over. He had given it up. It was peace at last. Where was James Ruleson at that hour? The Domine had said, "Do not disturb him. We know not what now is passing in his soul. Let him learn in peace whatever God wishes him to learn, in this pause between one life and another."

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

Margot was on her bed in another room. Christine knelt down at her side, and said gently, "Mither, the great, wonderful hour has come. The Domine has gane for The Cup. With your ain dear hands you will spread the cloth, and cut the bread, for your last eating wi' him. And, Mither, you won't cry out, and weep, as those do who have nae hope o' meeting again. You will mak' yoursel' do as the daughters o' God do, who call Him 'Feyther'! You'll be strong in the Lord, Mither, and bid Feyther 'good-by,' like those who are sure they will meet to part no more."

And Margot whispered, "I was brought low, and He helped me."

A few hours later, in this simple cottage bedroom, the miracle of Love's last supper in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, was remembered. With her own hands Margot covered a little table at her husband's bedside with her finest and whitest linen. She cut the bread into the significant morsels, and when the Domine came, he placed them solemnly on the silver plate of the consecrated service, and poured wine into the holy vessel of The Communion. All was then ready, and they sat down to wait for that lightening which so often comes when the struggle is over and the end near.

They waited long. Ruleson's deep sleep lasted for hours, and the Domine began to hope it might be that life-giving sleep which often introduces the apparently dying to a new lease of life.

CHRISTINE

He awoke after midnight, with the word "Margot" on his lips, and Margot slipped her hand into his, and kissed him.

"We are going to have supper with the Lord Christ. Will you join us, Ruleson?"

"Ay, will—I—gladly!"

After the simple rite Ruleson was quite happy. He said a few words privately to the Domine, asked for his grandson, and told him to be a good man, and a minister of God, and promised if it was in God's will he would watch o'er him, and then blessed and sent him away.

"I might hae another struggle at the last. I dinna want him to see it."

"The struggle is over, James," answered the Domine. "Be still, and wait for the salvation of the Lord."

And for some hours, even until the day broke, and the shadows began to flee away, that dying room was in a strange peace. Margot and Christine sat almost motionless, watching their loved one's face growing more and more calm and content, and the Domine stood or sat at the foot of the bed, and all was intensely still.

"Great things are passing in the soul now," he said to the women. "It is contemplating the past. It is judging itself. It is bearing witness to the righteousness and mercy of its Maker. Pray that it may come from this great assize justified through Christ." Soon after, he added "The tide has

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

turned, he will go out with the tide. Stand near him now, and sing softly with me his last human prayer:

“Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly;
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is nigh:
Hide me, oh my Saviour, hide!
Till the storm of life is past,
Safe into the haven guide,
Oh receive my soul at last!”

Once the dying man opened his eyes, once he smiled, but ere the last line was finished, James Ruleson had

Gone on that long voyage all men take,
And with angelic help, had once again,
By unknown waters, entered a new world.

Time waits neither for the living nor the dead, and when a month had come and gone, Margot and Christine had accepted, in some measure, their inevitable condition. Ruleson had left his small affairs beyond all dispute. His cottage was bequeathed entirely to his wife and daughter, “for all the days of their lives.” His boat was to be sold, and the proceeds given to his widow. The two hundred cash he had in the bank was also Margot’s, and the few acres of land he owned he gave to his eldest son, Norman, who had stood faithfully by his

CHRISTINE

side through all his good and evil days. No one was dissatisfied except Norman's wife, who said her man, being the eldest born, had a full right to house and cash, and a' there was, saving Margot's lawful widow right. She said this so often that she positively convinced herself of its rightness and justice, "and some day," she frequently added, "I will let Mistress and Miss Ruleson know the ground on which they stand." To Norman, she was more explicit and denunciatory—and he let her talk.

It had been very positively stated in the adoption of James Ruleson, the younger, that the simple decease of his grandfather made him the adopted son of the Domine, and it was thought best to carry out this provision without delay. Margot had been seriously ill after the funeral, and she said calmly now, that she was only waiting until her change came. But life still struggled bravely within her for its promised length, and the Domine said Death would have to take her at unawares, if he succeeded yet awhile. This was the truth. The desire to live was still strong in Margot's heart, she really wished earnestly to live out all her days.

Now, public sympathy soon wears out. The village which had gone *en masse* to weep at James Ruleson's funeral, had in two weeks chosen Peter Brodie to fill his place. The women who were now busy with their spring cleaning, and their preparations for the coming herring season, could not afford to weep any longer with "thae set-up Rulesons."

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

Neil had ignored all of them at the funeral, Margot's sorrow they judged to be "a vera dry manifestation," and Christine would not talk about her father's last hours. The women generally disapproved of a grief that was so dry-eyed and silent.

So gradually the little house on the hill became very solitary. Jamie ran up from the school at the noon hour, and sometimes he stayed an hour or two with them after the school was closed. Then the Domine came for him, and they all had tea together. But as the evening twilight lengthened, the games in the playground lengthened, and the Domine encouraged the lad in all physical exercises likely to increase his stature and his strength.

Then the herring season came, and the Rulesons had nothing to do with it, and so they gradually lost their long preëminence. Everyone was busy from early to late with his own affairs. And the Rulesons? "Had they not their gentleman son, Neil? And their four lads wearing the Henderson uniform? And the Domine? And the lad Cluny Macpherson? Did he care for any human creature but Christine Ruleson?"

With these sentiments influencing the village society, it was no wonder that Margot complained that her friends had deserted her. She had been the leader of the village women in their protective and social societies, and there was no doubt she had been authoritative, and even at times tyrannical. But Margot did not believe she had ever gone too far.

CHRISTINE

She was sure that her leniency and consideration were her great failing.

So the winter came again, and Christine looked exceedingly weary. While Ruleson lived, Margot had relied on him, she was sure that he would be sufficient, but after his death, she encouraged an unreasonable trial of various highly reputed physicians. They came to her from Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and she believed that every fresh physician was the right one. The expense of this method was far beyond the profit obtained. Yet Christine could not bear to make any protest.

And the weeks went on, and there appeared to be neither profit nor pleasure in them. The Domine watched Christine with wonder, and in the second year of her vigil, with great anxiety. "Christine will break down soon, Margot," he said one day to the sick woman. "Look at the black shadows under her eyes. And her eyes are losing all their beauty, her figure droops, and her walk lags and stumbles. Could you not do with Faith for a few days, and let Christine get away for a change? You'll hae a sick daughter, if you don't do something, and that soon."

"I canna stand Faith Anderson. She's o'er set up wi' hersel'. I am that full o' pain and sorrow that Faith's bouncing happiness is a perfect blow in a body's face."

"The schoolmaster's wife?"

"I'm no a bairn, Domine; and she treats auld and young as if they were bairns. She would want

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

to teach me my alphabet, and my catechism o'er again."

"There's Nannie Brodie. She is a gentle little thing. She will do all Christine does for a few shillings a week."

"What are you thinking of, Domine? I couldna afford a few shillings a week. I hae wonderfu' expenses wi' doctors and medicines, and my purse feels gey light in my hand."

"I see, Margot, that my advice will come to little. Yet consider, Margot, if Christine falls sick, who will nurse her? And what will become o' yourself?"

He went away with the words, and he found Christine sitting on the doorstep, watching the sea, as she used to watch it for her father's boat. She looked tired, but she smiled brightly when he called her name.

"My dear lassie," he said, "you ought to have some new thoughts, since you are not likely to get new scenes. Have you any nice books to read?"

"No, sir. Mither stopped *Chambers Magazine* and *The Scotsman*, and I ken a' the books we hae, as if they were school books. Some o' them are Neil's old readers."

"You dear, lonely lassie! This day I will send you some grand novels, and some books of travel. Try and lose yourself and your weariness in them."

"O, Sir! If you would do this, I can bear everything! I can do everything!"

"I'll go home this hour, and the books will be here

CHRISTINE

before dark. Get as much fresh air as you can, and fill your mind with fresh pictures, and fresh ideas, and I wouldn't wonder if you win back your spirits, and your beauty. Your mother is a great care, lassie!"

"Ay, Doctor, but she is in God's care. I hae naething to do but help and pleasure her, when she's waking. She sleeps much o' her time now. I think the medicine o' the last doctor frae Aberdeen, is the because o' her sleepiness. I was going to ask you to take a look at it."

He did so, and said in reply, "There's no harm in it, but it would be well enough to give it with a double portion of water."

Then the Domine went away, and Christine did not know that this hour was really the turning point of her life. And it is perhaps well for the majority that this important crisis is seldom recognized on its arrival. There might be interferences, and blunderings of all kinds. But a destiny that is not realized, or meddled with, goes without let or hindrance to its appointed end.

Christine rose with a new strength in her heart and went to her mother. "Come here, dear lass," said Margot. "The Domine was telling me thou art sick wi' the nursing o' me, and that thou must hae a change."

"The Domine had no right to say such a thing. I am quite well, Mither. I should be sick, if I was one mile from you. I have no work and no pleasure

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

away from your side, dear, dear Mither! I am sorry the Domine judged me sae hardly."

"The Domine is an interfering auld man. He is getting outside his pulpit. When I was saying I missed wee Jamie, and I wished him to come mair often to see me, you should hae watched him bridle up. 'James must be more under control,' he said, in a vera pompous manner. I answered, 'The laddie is quite biddable, Doctor,' and he said, 'Mistress, that belongs to his years. He is yet under authority, and I cannot allow him too much freedom.' And the bairn is my ain! My ain grandchild! Too much freedom wi' his sick grandmother! Heard ye ever the like?"

"Weel, Mither, he was right in a way. Jamie has been a bit stiff-necked and self-willed lately."

"There isna a thing wrang wi' the laddie."

"Weel, he behaves better wi' you than wi' any other person. The Domine is making a fine lad o' him."

"He was a' that, before the Domine kent him at a'. I wasna carin' for the reverend this afternoon. I dinna wonder the village women are saying he has his fingers in everyone's pie."

"It is for everyone's good, Mither, if it be true; but you ken fine how little the village say-so can be trusted; and less now, than ever; for since you arena able to sort their clashes, they say what they like."

"Nae doubt o' it, Christine."

"The Domine promised to send me some books to

CHRISTINE

read. You see, Mither, the pain you hae wearies you sae that you sleep a great deal, and I am glad o' it, for the sleep builds up what the pain pulls down, so that you hold up your ain side better than might be."

"That's a plain truth, dearie."

"Then when you sleep, I am lonely, and I get to thinking and worrying anent this and that, and so I look tired when there's naething wrang. But if I had books to read, when I hadna yoursel' to talk wi', I would be gey happy, and maybe full o' wonderfuls to tell you as you lie wakin' and wearyful."

"It is a maybe, and you hae to give maybes a trial."

"You see, Mither, we gave up our *Chambers Magazine* and *The Scotsman* when Feyther left us alane."

"It was right to do sae; there was sae many expenses, what wi' the burying, and wi' my sickness, the last item being a constant outgo."

"You must hae the medicines, and we be to gie up all expenses, if so be it was needed for that end."

"Weel, if I was to stay here, and be a troubler much langer, that might be needed, but I hae a few pounds left yet."

"It will never be needed. The children o' the righteous hae a sure claim on the God o' the righteous, and He is bound and ready to answer it. Those were almost the last words Feyther said to

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

me. I was wearying for books, and you see, He has sent them to me, without plack or bawbee."

"Weel, lassie, if books will mak' you happy, I am glad they are coming to you. Whiles you can read a short story out o' *Chambers* to mysel'. I used to like thae little love tales, when you read one sometimes to us by the fireside. Anyway, they were mair sensible than the village clash-ma-clavers; maist o' which are black, burning lees."

"Dear Mither, we'll hae many a happy hour yet, wi' the tales I shall read to you."

"Nae doubt o' it. They'll all o' them be lees—made up lees—but the lees won't be anent folks we ken, and think weel of, or anent oursel's."

"They won't be anent anybody, Mither. The men who write the stories make up the men and women, and then make up the things they set them to do, and to say. It is all make-believe, ye ken, but many a good lesson is learned by good stories. They can teach, as well as sermons. Folks that won't go and hear a sermon will maybe read a good story."

"You wadna daur to read them in a kirk, for they arena the truth."

"Weel, there are many other things you wouldna care to read in the kirk—a perfectly honest love letter, for instance."

"When did you hear frae Cluny?"

"Yesterday. He is kept vera close to his business, and he is studying navigation, so that helps him to get the long hours in foreign ports over. He's

CHRISTINE

hoping to get a step higher at the New Year, and to be transferred to the Atlantic boats. Then he can perhaps get awa' a little oftener. Mither, I was thinking when you got strong enough, we might move to Glasgow. You would hae a' your lads, but Norman, mair at your hand then."

"Ay, but Norman is worth a' the lave o' them, and beside if I left this dear auld hame, Norman would want to come here, and I couldna thole the thought o' that ill luck. Yet it would be gey hard to refuse him, if he asked me, and harder still to think night and day o' his big, blundering, rough lads, among my flower beds, and destroying everything in baith house and bounds. I couldna think o' it! Your feyther brought me here when the house was naething at a' but a but and a ben. A bed and a table, a few chairs, and a handfu' o' crockery was a' we had in the wide warld—save and forbye, as I hae often told you, my gold wedding ring." And Margot held up her white, shrunken hand, and looked at it with tears streaming down her face. And oh, how tenderly Christine kissed her hand and her face, and said she was right, and she did not wonder she feared Norman's boys. They were a rough-and-tumble lot, but would make fine men, every one o' them being born for the sea, and the fishing.

"Just sae, Christine. They'll do fine in a fishing boat, among nets and sails. But here! Nay, nay! And then there's the mither o' them! That woman in my place! Can you think o' it, lassie?"

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

"We'll never speak again o' the matter. I ken how you feel, Mither. It would be too cruel! it would be mair than you could bear."

Then there was a man's voice heard in the living room, and Christine went to answer the call. It was the Domine's messenger, with his arms full of books. And Christine had them taken into her mother's room, and for a whole hour sat beside her and showed her books full of pictures, and read short anecdotes from the magazine volume, and Margot for a while seemed interested, but finally said with an air of great weariness: "Tak' them all awa', dearie. Ye can hae the best bedroom for them."

"Dear Mither, will you let me hae the use o' it? I will keep a' in order, and it is sae near to yoursel', I could hear you if you only spoke my name."

"Tak' the room and welcome. Neil had it for many a year. It has a feeling o' books and lesson-larning in it."

So that night, when her mother was in her first sleep, Christine took her books into this large, silent room. It faced the sea. It had an atmosphere different from that of any other room in the house, and no one but herself was likely to enter it. There was a broad sill to the largest window, and Christine arranged the Domine's books on it. In the dozen or more volumes there was a pleasant variety—history, poetry and the popular novels of the time—especially the best work of George Eliot, Miss Braddon, Thackeray, and Dickens.

CHRISTINE

It was all so wonderful to Christine, she could hardly believe it. She touched them lovingly, she could have kissed them. For in those days in Scotland, good literature was yet a sort of luxury. A person in a country place who had a good novel, and was willing to loan it, was a benefactor. Christine had borrowed from the schoolmaster's wife all she had to lend, and for several weeks had been without mental food and mental outlook. Was there any wonder that she was depressed and weary-looking?

Now all quickly changed. The housework went with her as if it were paid to do so. She sang as she worked. She was running in and out of Mither's room with unfailing cheerfulness, and Margot caught her happy tone, and they were sufficient for each other. Mother and books would have been sufficient alone, but they had also many outside ties and interests. The Domine allowed Jamie to go to grandmother's once a day. There were Cluny and Neil, and all the rest of the boys, the Domine and the villagers, the kirk and the school; and always Jamie came in the afternoon, and brought with him the daily *Glasgow Herald*. It was the Domine's way. At first he had not consciously recognized what Christine required, but as soon as the situation was evident to him, he hastened to perform the good work, and he did the duty liberally, and wearied not in it.

So the days came and went, and neither Margot nor Christine counted them, and Cluny came whenever he could by any travel get a few hours with

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

Christine. And the herring season came and went again, and was not very successful. Margot and Christine were sorry, but it was no longer a matter of supreme importance. Still, the gossip concerning the fishing always interested Margot, and someone generally brought it to her. If no one did, she frankly asked the Domine what was going on, for he always knew everything affecting the people who sat in Culrairie Kirk of Scotland.

Certainly he watched Christine's improvement with the greatest interest and pleasure. In six months she was a far more beautiful woman than she had ever before been. Her soul was developing on the finest lines, and it was constantly beautifying its fleshly abode. The work was like that of a lapidary who, day by day, cuts and polishes a gem of great value. Even Margot occasionally looked intently at her daughter, and said wonderingly, "You are growing vera bonnie, Christine, the Domine must hae lost his sight, when he thought you were sick and wearying for a change."

"I'm never sick, Mither. Whiles, when I was worrying mysel' anent Angus Ballister, I used to hae a dowie weariness come o'er me; but since feyther went awa' I havena had as much as a headache. Now if it suits you, Mither, I'll gie you your knitting, I'm wanting to go and write down something."

"Weel, gie me the needles, and gie my love to Cluny, and tell him to bring me ane o' them white fuchsia plants he saw in a Glasgow window."

CHRISTINE

"I hae given that word already, Mither."

"Do it again, lassie. Any man bides twice telling."

But the writing Christine wished to do was not a letter to her lover. It was some lines that had been running through her mind for an hour, and she knew that the only way in which she could lay their persistency, was to write them down. She had just finished this work, when the door was opened, and the Domine came in, with a gust of wind, that blew the paper on which she was writing across the room. He caught it first, and he smiled when he saw it was poetry.

"I'll even read it, Christine, it might be worth while."

"I couldna help writing the lines down, Sir. They bothered me till I did sae. They always do."

"Oh-h! Then the lines are your own. That is a circumstance I cannot pass."

"Gie them to me, Sir. Please!"

"When I have read them, Christine," and immediately he proceeded to read them aloud. He read them twice, the second time with care and sympathy:

"The boats rocked idly on the bay,
The nets hung straight within the deep,
On the hard deck the fishers lay,
Lost in a deep and dreamless sleep.
Why should they care, and watch, and wake—
Nets of the sleeping fishers take.

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

Only the sea the silence broke,
Until the Master Fisher spoke.

"O Christ, Thou must have loved the sea,
Its waves held firm Thy steady feet.
Wouldst Thou not talk of boats and nets,
If Thou some fishermen shouldst meet?
Yes, Thou wouldst speak of boats and nets,
Though walking on the golden street.

"And if, O Christ, Thou met'st some day
The Fishermen from Galilee,
Wouldst Thou not speed the hours away,
Recalling life upon their sea?
And sure their hearts would burn and thrill,
Remembering, Thy 'Peace be still!'

"The Crystal Sea could ne'er replace
The old Earth Sea, so wild and gray—
The strain, the struggle, and the race
For daily bread, from day to day.
O Christ! we fishermen implore,
Say not, 'The sea shall be no more.'

"Its tides have seen Thy godlike face—
Look down into its hidden graves,
Have felt Thy feet in solemn pace
Pass through the valley of its waves.
Fisher of Galilee! We pray,
Let not the Earth Sea pass away."

"Weel, Sir, will you give me the bit paper now?"
"I want you to give it to me. In a year I should

CHRISTINE

like to read it again, and see how you have improved."

"Take your will wi' it, Sir."

"To write poetry teaches you how to write prose—teaches you the words of the English language, their variety and value. A good prose writer can write poetry, for he is acquainted wi' words, and can always find the word he wants; but a good poet is not often a good prose writer."

"How is that, Sir?"

"Because he is satisfied with his own vehicle of expression. He thinks it is the best. I am glad you have begun by writing poetry—but do not stop there." As he was speaking he folded up the bit of paper in his hand, and put it into his pocketbook. Then he went to speak to Margot.

"Margot," he said, "what do you think? Christine has been writing a poem, and it is better than might be."

"Christine has been making up poetry ever since she was a bit bairn. She reads a great deal o' poetry to me out o' the books you sent her. Oh, Domine, they hae been a wonderfu' pleasuring to us baith! Though I never thought I wad live to find my only pleasure in novels and bits o' poetry. Three or four years ago I wad hae laughed anyone to scorn who said such a thing could happen to Margot Ruleson. 'Deed wad I!"

"God often brings the impossible to pass, and even nourishes us on it. What has Christine been reading to you?"

A HAPPY BIT OF WRITING

"She has read to me the doings o' David Copperfield, and about that puir lad, Oliver Twist. I was greatly ta'en up wi' the lads. I maist forgot mysel', listening to their troubles and adventures."

"Very good, Margot. What is she reading to you now?"

"A book by a Mr. Thackeray. His picture is in the book. It's what they ca' a frontispiece. He has a big head, and he isna handsome, but he looks like he could mak' up a good story."

"Is the book called 'Vanity Fair'?"

"That's the very name. I dinna see yet the meaning o' it."

"Do you like it?"

"Weel, I like the folks best that I shouldna like. There's an auld woman in it, that I wad gie a cup o' tea and an hour's crack to, any day, and be glad o' the pleasure o' it; and there's the girl, called Becky, that isna at a' a kirklike girl, but I canna help liking her weel. I think I wad hae been her marrow, if I had been born and brought up as she was. I'm sure it must be gey hard for men to mak' up the likeness o' a real good woman—they mak' them too good, you feel as if they should be in heaven, and mostly I find they send them there by early death, or some other disease, or mischance."

"So you like Becky?"

"I do. There's circumstances, Sir! They alter cases. They do that! If a woman has the fight wi' the warld on her hands, she'll be requiring a little o'

CHRISTINE

the deil in her, just to keep the deil out o' her. I hope the man Thackeray has had sense enou' to mak' Becky come a' right at the lang end."

"I believe she becomes very respectable, and joins the Church of England."

"That would be the right thing for her. I hae heard that it is a vera broad church, and that its deacons——"

"Wardens, Margot."

"Wardens be it. I hae heard that they dinna dog its members round Sunday and work days, as our deacons do. Your ain deacons are vera officious, sir."

"Elder James Ruleson, while he lived, saw that every kirk officer did his duty."

"Thank you, Domine! It is good to hear his name. Everyone seems to have forgotten him—everyone."

"He is not forgotten, Margot. His name is on nearly every page o' the kirk books, and the school will keep his memory green. I am going to propose a Ruleson Day, and on it give all the children a holiday. Weel, Margot, here comes Christine, and I believe she has Becky in hand." Then he turned to Christine and said, "You have taken steps on a fair road, go straight forward." And she smiled, and her smile was like sunshine, and the Domine felt the better for it. He lifted his head higher, and took longer steps, and walked home with a new and pleasant hope in his heart.

CHAPTER X

ROBERTA INTERFERES

Small service is true service while it lasts.

He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.

NEARLY two years had passed since James Ruleson's death, and Christine was facing an embarrassing condition. She was nearly without money. During the severe illness which followed her husband's death, Margot had entrusted all she had to Christine, except the sum she had retained for her own burial; and Christine knew this was a provision all Culraine women regarded as a sacred duty. To break into this sum would be a serious, perhaps a dangerous, trial to Margot. However, there was the ninety pounds that Neil had borrowed from her, and never repaid. Now she must apply for it, must indeed urge its immediate return, and she wrote her brother the following letter:

DEAR NEIL,

We are in a sair strait. I am nearly without money, and Mither has none left but her burial siller, and you know it will nearly kill her to break into that. I would not ask you to pay me the ninety pounds you owe me, if there was any

CHRISTINE

other way I could do. I would go out and sell fish, before I would trouble you. But surely it will not be hurting you any way now, to pay ninety pounds. Jim Carnagie was telling me that you were doing a well-paying business. Dear Neil, it is for your mither! She pleaded for you to have your own will and wish all your life long. I need not remind you of all her thoughtfulness for your comfort, while you were at the Maraschal. She is dying, a cruel, hard, long death. I cannot, no, I cannot, trouble her last days anent the siller she needs for food to keep her in life, and for medicines to soothe her great pain. Neil, I have always loved and helped you. I was glad when Miss Rath took to you kindly, for I knew you had to have some woman to look after your special ways and likings. Tell her the truth, and I am sure she will not oppose your paying such a just debt. Neil, answer me at once. Do not think about it, and delay and delay. You know, dear Neil, it is getting on the fourth year, since I loaned you it, and you promised to pay me out of the first money you earned. I think, dear, you will now pay me as lovingly as I let you have it when you needed it so badly.

Mither does not know I am writing you, or even that we need money, so haste to make me more easy, for I am full of trouble and anxiety.

Your loving sister,
CHRISTINE.

This letter had a singular fate. It was left at Neil's house five minutes after Neil had left his house for a journey to London, on some important business for the Western Bank. It was consequently given to Mrs. Ruleson. She looked at it curiously.

ROBERTA INTERFERES

It was a woman's writing, and the writing was familiar to her. The half-obliterated post office stamp assured her. It was from Neil's home, and there was the word "Haste" on the address, so there was probably trouble there. With some hesitation she opened and read it, read slowly and carefully, every word of it, and when she had done so, flung it from her in passionate contempt.

"The lying, thieving, contemptible creature," she said, in a low, intense voice. "I gave him ninety pounds, when his father died. He told me then some weird story about this money. And I believed him. I, Roberta Rath, believed him! I am ashamed of myself! Reginald told me long syne that he knew the little villain was making a private hoard for himself, and that the most o' his earnings went to it. I will look into that business next. Reggie told me I would come to it. I cannot think of it now, my first care must be this poor, anxious girl, and her dying mother. I believe I will go to Culraine and see them! He has always found out a reason for me not going. I will just show him I am capable of taking my own way."

She reflected on this decision for a few moments, and then began to carry it out with a smiling hurry. She made arrangements with her cook for the carrying on of the household for her calculated absence of three days. Then she dressed herself with becoming fashion and fitness, and in less than an hour, had visited the Bank of Scotland, and reached the

CHRISTINE

railway station. Of course she went first to Edinburgh, and she lingered a little there, in the fur shops. She selected a pretty neck piece and muff of Russian sable, and missed a train, and so it was dark, and too late when she reached the town to go to the village of Culraine.

"It is always my way," she murmured, as she sat over her lonely cup of tea in her hotel parlor. "I am so long in choosing what I want, that I lose my luck. I wonder now if I have really got the best and the bonniest. Poor father, he was aye looking for a woman to be a mother to me, and never found one good enough. I was well in my twenties before I could decide on a husband; and I am pretty sure I waited too long. Three women bought furs while I was swithering about mine. It is just possible to be too careful. Liking may be better than consideration. Johnny Lockhart told me if I would trust my heart, instead of my brain, I would make better decisions. It might be so. Who can tell?"

In the morning, when she had finished her breakfast, she went to the window of her room and looked into the street. Several Culraine fishing-women were calling their fresh haddock and flounders, and she looked at them critically.

"They are young and handsome," she thought, "but their dress is neither fashionable, nor becoming. I should think it was a trial for a pretty girl to wear it—too short petticoats—stripes too yellow and wide—too much color every way—earrings quite out of

ROBERTA INTERFERES

fashion—caps picturesque, but very trying, and a sailor hat would be less trouble and more attractive. Well, as the fisherwomen are crying fresh haddock, I should think I may call on Christine, and not break any social law of the place.”

Christine was not now a very early riser. If Margot had a restless, bad night; both of them often fell asleep at the dawning, and it had occasionally been as late as eight o'clock when their breakfast was over. Roberta Rath's visit happened to fall on one of these belated mornings. It was nearly nine o'clock, but Margot had just had her breakfast, and was washed and dressed, and sitting in a big chair by the fireside of her room.

Christine was standing by a table in the living room. There was a large pan of hot water before her, and she was going to wash the breakfast dishes. Then there was a soft, quick knock at the door, and she called a little peremptorily, “Come in.” She thought it was some girl from the school, who wanted to borrow a necklace or some bit of finery for an expected dance. And it is not always that the most obliging of women are delighted to lend their ornaments.

When Roberta answered her curt invitation, she was amazed. She did not know her, she had never seen Roberta, nor even a likeness of her, for there were no photographs then, and the daguerreotype was expensive and not yet in common request. She looked with wide-open eyes at the lady, and the lady

CHRISTINE

smiled. And her smile was entrancing, for she seemed to smile from head to feet. Then she advanced and held out her hand.

"I am Roberta," she said. And Christine laid down her cup and towel, and answered with eager pleasure, "You are vera welcome, Roberta. I am Christine."

"Of course! I know that. You are exactly the Christine I have dreamed about," and she lifted up her small face, and Christine kissed her, before she was aware. It was the most extraordinary thing, and Christine blushed and burned, but yet was strangely pleased and satisfied.

"Can I stay with you till four this afternoon, Christine? I want to very much."

"You will be mair than welcome. Mither will be beside hersel' wi' the visit. Is Neil wi' you?"

"No. I have come of my own wish and will. Neil is in London. Let me speak to the man who drove me here, and then I will tell you how it is."

She left the house for a few minutes, and came back with a beaming face, and a parcel in her hand. "Suppose, Christine," she said, "you show me where I can take off my bonnet and cloak and furs." So Christine went with her to the best bedroom, and she cried out at the beauty of its view, and looked round at the books and papers, and the snow-white bed, and was wonder struck at the great tropic sea shell, hanging before the south window; for its wide rose-pink cavity was holding a fine plant of musk-

ROBERTA INTERFERES

flower, and its hanging sprays of bloom, and heavenly scent, enthralled her.

"What a charming room!" she cried. "One could dream of heaven in it."

"Do you dream, Roberta?"

"Every night."

"Do you like to dream?"

"I would not like to go to bed, and not dream."

"I am glad you feel that way. Some people cannot dream."

"Poor things! Neil could not understand me about dreaming. Nor could I explain it to him."

"Lawyers don't dream. I have heard that. I suppose the folk in the other warld canna fash themselves wi' the quarreling o' this warld."

Roberta was untying the parcel containing the furs, as Christine spoke, and her answer was to put the long boa of sable around Christine's neck and place the muff in her right hand. Now, good fur suits everyone—man or woman—and Christine was regally transformed by it.

"Eh, Roberta!" she cried. "What bonnie furs! I never saw the like o' them! Never!"

"But now they are yours!"

"You dinna—you canna mean, that you gie them to me, Roberta?"

"I surely do mean just that. I give them to you with all my heart and you look like a Norse princess in them. Come, give me a kiss for the boa, and a kiss for the muff, and we will call the gift square."

CHRISTINE

Then Roberta kissed Christine and they laughed a sweet, gay little laugh together. And Christine said, "I hae always wanted a sister. Now I hae gotten one weel to my liking! And O, the bonnie furs! The bonnie furs! They suit me fine, Roberta! They suit me fine!" and she smiled at herself in the little mirror, and was happy, beyond expression.

"You are as happy as if you had found a fortune, Christine!"

"I hae found mair than a fortune, Roberta! I hae found a sister! I wasna looking for such good luck to come to me!"

"That is the way good luck comes—always as a surprise. We watch for it on the main road, and it just slips round a corner." Then Roberta took Christine by the hand, and they went to the living-room, and Christine began to wash her teacups, and as she laid them dripping on the tray, Roberta took the towel and wiped them dry.

"You shouldna do that, Roberta."

"Why not, Christine?"

"It isna wark for you."

"While Father lived, I always washed the china beside him. Then he read the newspaper, and we had happy talks. We were plain-living folk, until Father died. Then Reggie and I set up for quality. We had the money, and Reggie had quality friends, and I thought it would be fine."

"Do you think it is fine?"

ROBERTA INTERFERES

"It is no better than it is spoken of. Christine, can you guess what brought me here?"

"Did you get a letter I wrote Neil?"

"Yes."

"Then I know why you came."

"Neil had just left for London. You asked for no delay. So I brought the money, Christine, and I had the Bank calculate the proper amount of interest for four years, at five per cent."

"There was no interest asked. There is none due. I didna lend a' the money I had on interest, but on love."

"Then here is the money, Christine, and I must thank you for Neil, for the long credit you have given him."

"I havena been needing the siller until now, but now it is a real salvation."

Christine put the money in her breast, and then together they put the cleansed china in its proper place. Just as they finished this duty, a little handbell tinkled, and Christine said,

"That is Mither's call. Let us go to her."

"Mither, dear Roberta is here. She has come to see you." And the young woman stood looking into the old woman's face, and in a moment something inarticulate passed between them. They smiled at each other, and Roberta stooped and kissed the white, worn face. There needed no further explanation. In a few minutes the three women were conversing in the most intimate and cheerful manner.

CHRISTINE

To her mother, Christine appeared to be rather silent. Margot wished she would be more effusive, and she exerted herself to make up for Christine's deficiency in this respect. But the release from great anxiety often leaves the most thankful heart apparently quiet, and apparently indifferent. Many who have prayed fervently for help, when the help comes have no words on their tongues to speak their gratitude. Flesh and spirit are exhausted, before the Deliverer they are speechless. Then He who knoweth our infirmities speaks for us.

To make what dinner she could, and put the house in order was then Christine's duty, and she went about it, leaving Roberta with Margot. They soon became quite at ease with each other, and Christine could hear them laughing at their own conversation. After awhile they were very quiet, and Christine wondered if her mother had again become sleepy. On the contrary, she found Margot more alive and more interested than she had seen her since her husband's death.

There was a crochet needle between them, and they were both absorbed in what it was doing. Crochet was then a new thing on the earth, as far as England and Scotland was concerned; and at this date it was the reigning womanly fad. Margot had seen and dreamed over such patterns of it as had got into magazines and newspapers, but had never seen the work itself. Now Roberta was teaching

ROBERTA INTERFERES

her its easy stitches, and Margot, with all a child's enthusiasm, was learning.

"Look, Christine," she cried. "Look, Christine, at the bonnie wark I am learning! It is the crochet wark. We hae read about it, ye ken, but see for yoursel'. Look, lassie," and she proudly held out a strip of the first simple edging.

The three women then sat down together, and there was wonder and delight among them. A bit of fine, delicate crochet now gets little notice, but then it was a new sensation, and women thought they lacked an important source of pleasure, if they went anywhere without the little silk bag holding their crochet materials. Roberta had crocheted in the train, as long as it was light, and she fully intended to crochet all day, as she sat talking to her new relations.

Margot could knit blindfolded, she learned by some native and natural instinct. In two days she would have been able to teach Roberta.

There was a simple dinner of baked fish, and a cup of tea, and Christine beat an egg in a cup and was going to carry it to Margot, when Roberta stayed her. "Does she like it in that sloppy way?" she asked.

"Weel, it is for her good. She has to like it."

"We can make it far nicer. See here," and Roberta beat the egg in the cupful of milk, added a little sugar, and placed it in the oven. In a few minutes it was a solid, excellent custard, and Margot

CHRISTINE

enjoyed it very much. "I ne'er liked raw food," she said, "and raw egg isna any more eatable than raw fish, or raw meat."

In the afternoon the Domine and Jamie came in, and Roberta won his heart readily with her gay good nature and thoughtful kindness to the sick woman. He had put a letter into Christine's hand, as he came in and said to her, "Go your ways ben, and read it, but say naething to your mither anent its contents. Later I'll give you good reasons for this."

So Christine went away, and opened her letter, and there fell from it a five-pound note. And the letter was from a great magazine, and it said the money was for the "Fisherman's Prayer" and he would be very glad if she would write him more about fishers. There were also a few pleasant words of praise, but Christine's eyes were full of happy tears, she could not read them. What she did was to lay the letter and the money on her bed, and kneel down beside it, and let her silence and her tears thank the God who had helped her. "I was brought low and He helped me," she whispered, as she bathed her eyes and then went back to the company.

Such a happy afternoon followed! The Domine was in a delightful mood, Jamie recited for the first time "How Horatio Kept the Bridge," and Margot was as busy as her weak, old fingers would let her be. With the Domine's approval, Christine showed her letter to Roberta, and they, too, held a little tri-

ROBERTA INTERFERES

umph over the good, clever girl, for it was not vanity that induced her confidence, it was that desire for human sympathy, which even Divinity feels, or He would not ask it, and Himself prompt its offering.

Soon after five o'clock they had a cup of tea together, and Roberta's cab was waiting, and the fortunate day was over. Roberta was sorry to go away. She said she had had one of the happiest days of her life. She left her own little silk crochet bag with Margot, and gave her gladly her pretty silver hook with its ivory handle, and the cotton she had with her. She said she would send hooks of different sizes, and the threads necessary for them, and also what easy patterns she could find.

She went away amid smiles and blessings, and the Domine and Jamie went with her. They would see her safely to her hotel, they said, but she would not part with them so early. She entreated them to dine and spend the evening with her. And so they did. And their talk was of Christine, of her love and patience, and her night-and-day care. Even her orderly house and personal neatness were duly praised.

Roberta left for her Glasgow home, early on the following morning, and arrived at Monteith Row a little wearied, but quite satisfied with the journey she had taken. What the result to herself would be, she could hardly imagine. But its uncertainty kept her restless. She had resolved to clean and prepare the house for winter, during her husband's absence, but she could not do it. A woman needs a

CHRISTINE

stiff purpose in her heart, when she pulls her home to pieces. If anything is going to happen, it usually chooses such a time of discomfort and disorder.

She found it far more pleasant to select crochet hooks and cotton for Margot and herself. She sent the Domine a book that she knew would be acceptable, and to Jamie she sent a Rugby School pocket-knife, containing not only the knives, but the other little tools a boy finds so necessary. To Christine she sent a large, handsome portfolio, and such things as a person addicted to writing poetry requires. She could settle to nothing, for indeed she felt her position to be precarious. She knew that she could not live a day with Neil, unless he was able to account satisfactorily for his theft—she called it theft to herself—of the first ninety pounds.

Neil had promised to be home in a week, but it was two weeks ere he returned. He said business had detained him, and what can a woman say to "business"? It appears to cover, and even cancel, all other obligations. If there had been any tendency in Roberta's heart to excuse, or even to forgive her husband, he killed the feeling by his continual excuses for delay. The lawyer who had accompanied him was home. What was Neil doing in London, when the principal in the case had returned?

At last she received particular instructions as to the train by which he would arrive. She took no notice of them, though it had been her custom to meet him. He was a little cross at this neglect, and more

ROBERTA INTERFERES

so, when the sound of his peremptory ring at the door brought only a servant to open it. He did not ask after her, and she did not appear, so he gave his valise to the servant, with orders to take it into the dining room. "I suppose your mistress is there?" he asked. He was told she was there, and he added, "Inform her that I am in my room preparing for dinner, and order the cook to serve it at once."

Roberta saw the valise brought in, and she made no inquiries concerning it. She saw the dinner brought on, and she seated herself in her place at the table, and drew the chair holding the valise almost to her side. Then she waited.

Neil entered the room immediately. She did not turn her face to the door when it opened. She said as if speaking to a servant, "Place the soup at the head of the table. Mr. Ruleson is home."

When he took the head of the table, and so faced her, and could no longer be ignored, she said, "Is it really you, Neil? By what train did you arrive?"

"I told you, in my last letter, at what time I should arrive in Glasgow. You did not meet me, as I expected. I had to take a cab home."

"The stable man said one of the horses was acting as if it did not feel well. He thought it had better not be driven."

"He thought it would be more comfortable to stay at home this wet night. I had a very cold, disagreeable drive. I dare say I have taken a severe cold from it."

CHRISTINE

"The soup waits, if you will serve it."

He did so, remarking the while, "I sent you word I would be home by this train. Did you receive my letter?"

"Yes."

"Then why?"

"O you know, you have been coming by so many trains the past week, I thought it best not to take the sick horse out on such an uncertainty as your promise."

"I was, as I told you, detained by business."

"I hope you made it pay you."

"A few hundreds."

"Ah! Then you would not mind the expense of a cab."

"Do I ever mind necessary trifles?"

"I have never considered the matter," and the little laugh of indifference which closed the sentence, made him look at her attentively.

She was in full evening costume, and it struck him that tonight she looked almost handsome.

"Did you intend to go out this evening? Has my coming home prevented some social pleasure?"

"I had told Reginald to meet me in my box at Glover's Theater. Reginald is a social pleasure no woman would willingly miss."

"I do not approve of Reginald Rath, and I would rather you did not invite him to our box. His presence there, you know, would assuredly preclude mine."

ROBERTA INTERFERES

"I cannot interfere with dear Reggie's rights. The box is as much his, as mine. Father bought it in perpetuity, when the theater was built. The Merrys, and Taits, and others did the same—and Father left it to Reggie and myself, equally."

"It would be very unpleasant to you, if Reginald married a woman you did not like—and you really approve of so few women—it is remarkable how few——"

"Yet I have found a woman since you went away, that is perfect—as good and clever as she is beautiful."

"Where did you find her?"

"It is my little romance. I will tell you about her after dinner."

"I am not impatient."

This kind of half-querulous conversation continued during the service of dinner, but when the cloth had been drawn, and the wine and the nuts promised the absence of servants uncalled for, Roberta's attitude changed. She took a letter from her bag, and pushed it towards Neil.

"It is your letter," she said, "it came ten days ago."

"Why did you open it?"

"The word 'haste' was on it, and I thought it might be an announcement of your mother's death, or serious sickness—not that I thought you would care——"

"Of course, I care."

CHRISTINE

"Then you had better read the letter."

She watched his face gathering gloom and anger as he did so, and when he threw it from him with some unintelligible words, she lifted and put it again in her bag.

"That is my letter, Roberta, give it to me."

"You have just flung it away from you. I am going to keep it—it may be useful."

"What do you mean?"

"Neil, you must now answer me one or two questions. On your answers our living together depends."

He laughed softly, and said, "Nothing so serious as that, surely, Roberta!"

"Just that. When you went to your father's funeral, you told me that you owed your sister ninety pounds. You said it was her life's savings from both labor and gifts, and that she had loaned it to you, in order to make possible your final year at the Maraschal. You said further, that your father was not a saving man, and you feared they would be pinched for money to bury him. And I loaned you ninety pounds, being glad to see such a touch of natural affection in you. This letter from Christine says plainly that you never paid her the ninety pounds you borrowed from me. Is Christine telling the truth?"

"Yes."

"Yet, on your return, you gave me a rather tedious account of your mother's and Christine's thankful-

ROBERTA INTERFERES

ness for the money. It created in me a wrong impression of your mother and sister. I asked myself why they should be so crawlingly thankful to you for paying a just debt, and I thought meanly of them. Why did you not pay them the ninety pounds you borrowed from them? And why did you invent that servile bit of thankfulness?"

"I will tell you, Roberta. When I got home I found the whole village on my father's place. The funeral arrangements were, for a man in my father's position, exceedingly extravagant, and I was astonished at my mother's recklessness, and want of oversight. Christine was overcome with grief, and everything appeared to be left to men and women who were spending other people's money. I thought under the circumstances it was better not to pay Christine at that time, and I think I was right."

"So far, perhaps, you were prudent, but prudence is naturally mean and as often wrong as right. And why did you lie to me, so meanly and so tediously?"

"You have to lie to women, if you alter in the least anything you have told them. You cannot explain to a woman, unless you want to stand all day doing it. There are times when a lie is simply an explanation, a better one than the truth would be. The great Shakespeare held that such lies were more for number, than account."

"I do not take my opinion of lies from William Shakespeare. A lie is a lie. There was no need for a lie in this case. The lie you made up about it was

CHRISTINE

for account, not for number—be sure of that. You admit that you did not give Christine the ninety pounds you borrowed from me, in order to pay your debt to her. What did you do with the money?”

“Have you any right to ask me that question? If I borrowed ninety pounds from the bank, would they ask me what I did with it?”

“I neither know nor care what the bank would do. I am seeking information for Roberta Ruleson, and I shall take my own way to obtain it.”

“What is it you want to know?”

“What you did with that ninety pounds?”

“I banked it.”

“In what bank? There is no record of it in the Bank of Scotland, where I have always supposed, until lately, our funds were kept.”

“I did not put it in the Bank of Scotland. Every business man has an official banking account, and also a private banking account. I put that ninety pounds to my private bank account.”

“In what bank?”

“I do not give that information to anyone.”

“It must be pretty well known, since it has come as a matter of gossip to me.”

“You had better say ‘advice’ in place of gossip. What advice did you get?”

“I was told to look after my own money, that you were putting what little you made into the North British Security.”

“I suppose your clever brother told you that. If

ROBERTA INTERFERES

Reginald Rath does not leave my affairs alone, I shall make him."

"You will have a bad time doing it. Your check books, no doubt, are in this valise. You will now write me a check on the North British for one hundred and eighty pounds. It is only fair that the North British should pay out, as well as take in."

"Why should I give you a check for a hundred and eighty pounds?"

"I gave you ninety pounds when you went to your father's funeral, I took ninety pounds to Culraine ten days ago, in answer to the letter Christine wrote."

"You went to Culraine? You, yourself?"

"I went, and I had there one of the happiest days of my life. I got right into your mother's heart, and taught her how to crochet. I saw and talked with your splendid sister. She is the most beautiful, intelligent girl, I ever met."

"Such nonsense! She knows nothing but what I taught her!"

"She knows many things you know nothing about. I think she will become a famous woman."

"When Mother dies, she will marry Cluny Macpherson, who is a Fife fisher, and settle down among her class."

"I saw his picture, one of those new daguerreotypes. Such a splendid-looking fellow! He was a Fife fisher, he is now Second Officer on a Henderson boat, and wears their uniform. But it is Christine

CHRISTINE

I am telling you about. There is a new *Blackwood* on the table at your right hand. Turn to the eleventh page, and see what you find."

He did so, and he found "The Fisherman's Prayer." With a scornful face he read it, and then asked, "Do you believe that Christine Ruleson wrote that poem? I have no doubt it is the Domine's work."

"Not it. I saw the Domine. He and that lovable lad he has adopted——"

"My nephew."

"Dined at the hotel with me. I never before met such a perfect man. I did not know such men lived. The Domine was as happy as a child over Christine's success. She got five pounds for that poem."

"I do not believe it."

"I read the letter in which it came. They praised the poem, and asked for more contributions."

"If she is making money, why give her ninety pounds? It was absurd——"

"It was just and right. You say you have made a few hundreds on this London case, you will now write me a check for the two loans of ninety pounds each."

"I did not borrow the last ninety pounds. You took it to Culraine of your own will and desire. I do not owe the last ninety pounds. I refuse to pay it."

"I will give you until tomorrow morning to change your mind. When Christine wrote you the letter,

ROBERTA INTERFERES

now in your hand, she had not a sixpence in the world—her luck came with the money I took her. I do not think she will ever require anyone's help again. Oh, how could you grudge even your last penny to a sister like Christine?"

"She owes everything to me. I opened up her mind. I taught her to speak good English. I——"

"I borrowed all her life's savings, kept the money through the death of her father, the severe illness of her mother, and the total absence of anyone in her home to make money or in any way help her to bear the burden and fatigue of her great strait.' You can tell me in the morning what you propose to do."

Then she rose, and left the room, and Neil made no offer to detain her. In fact he muttered to himself, "She is a little premature, but it may be as well."

In the morning he rose while it was yet dark, and leaving word with a servant that he was going to Dalkeith and might be away four days, or longer, he left in the gloom of fog and rain, and early twilight, the home he was never to enter again. He had grown accustomed to every luxury and refinement in its well-ordered plenty, and he had not the slightest intention of resigning its comfortable conditions, but he had no conception of the kind of woman with whom he had now to deal. The wives of Culrairie, while dominant in business, gave to their men, in the household, almost an unquestioned authority; and

CHRISTINE

Neil had no experience which could lead him to expect Roberta would, in any essential thing, dare to disobey him. He even flattered himself that in leaving her alone he had left her to anxiety and unhappiness, and of course, repentance.

"I will just give her a little lesson," he said to himself, complacently. "She gave me until this morning. I will give her four or five days of solitary reflection, and no letters. No letters, Neil Rule-son! I think that treatment will teach her other people have rights, as well as herself."

Roberta did not appear to be disquieted by his absence. She sent a messenger for her brother, and ate a leisurely, pleasant meal, with the *Glasgow Herald* for a companion; and before she had quite finished it, Reginald appeared.

"Your early message alarmed me, Roberta," he said. "I hope all is well with you, dear?"

"Indeed, Reggie, I don't know whether it is well, or ill. Sit down and I will tell you exactly how my life stands." Then she related circumstantially all that had occurred—Neil's first request for ninety pounds at his father's death—his appropriation of that sum, and his refusal to say what had been done with it—Christine's letter of recent date which she now handed to her brother. Reginald read it with emotion, and said as he handed it back to his sister: "It is a sweet, pitiful, noble letter. Of course he answered it properly."

Then Roberta told him all the circumstances of

ROBERTA INTERFERES

her visit to Culraine, and when she had finished her narration, her brother's eyes were full of tears.

"Now, Reginald," she asked, "did I do wrong in going myself with the money?"

"Up to the receipt of Christine's letter, you supposed it had been paid?"

"Certainly I did, and I thought Neil's family rude and unmannerly for never making any allusion to its payment."

"So you paid it again, resolving to fight the affair out with Neil, when he came home. You really accepted the debt, and made it your own, and be sure that Neil will find out a way to make you responsible for its payment in law. In point of truth and honor, and every holy affection, it was Neil's obligation, and every good man and woman would cry shame on his shirking it. Roberta, you have made the supreme mistake! You have allied yourself with a mean, dishonorable caitiff—a creature in whose character baseness and wickedness meet; and who has no natural affections. As I have told you before, and often, Neil Ruleson has one idea—money. All the comforts and refinements of this home would be instantly abandoned, if he had them to pay for. He has a miserly nature, and only his love of himself prevents him from living on a crust, or a few potato parings."

"Oh, Reginald, you go too far."

"I do not. When a man can grudge his good, loving mother on her death-bed anything, or all that he

CHRISTINE

has, he is no longer fit for human companionship. He should go to a cave, or a garret, and live alone. What are you going to do? My dear, dear sister, what are you going to do?"

"What you advise, Reginald. For this reason I sent for you."

"Then listen. I knew a crisis of some kind must soon come between you and that—creature, and this is what I say—you must leave him. Every day you stay with him insults your humanity, and your womanhood. He says he will be four or five days away, we will have plenty of time for my plan. Before noon I will have here wagons and men in sufficient number to empty this house into Menzie's granite storage in two days. Send the silver to the bank. I will put it in a cab, and take it myself. Pack things you value highly in one trunk, which can be specially insured. Our pictures we will place in the Ludin Picture Gallery. We can clear the house in three days, and on the morning of the fourth day, young Bruce Kinlock will move into it. If Neil can face Kinlock, it will be the worse for him, for Kinlock's temper blazes if he but hear Neil's name, and his hand goes to his side, for the dirk with which his fathers always answered an enemy."

"Then, Reginald, when I have turned myself out of house and home, what follows?"

"We will take a passage to New Orleans."

"New Orleans! Why there? Such an out-of-the-way place."

ROBERTA INTERFERES

"Exactly. That creature will argue thus—they have gone to some place on the Continent—very likely France. And he will probably try to make you a deal of trouble. I have never named New Orleans to anyone. Even our friends will never suspect our destination, for we shall go first to France, and take a steamer from some French port, for New Orleans. When we arrive there, we have a new world before us, and can please ourselves where we go, and where we stay. Now, Roberta, decide at once. We have time, but none too much, and I will work night and day to get you out of the power of such a husband."

"He may repent."

"We will give him time and reason to do so. He has been too comfortable. You have given him constant temptation to wrong you. He will not repent until he feels the pinch of poverty and the want of a home. Then he may seek you in earnest, and I suppose you will forgive him."

"What else could I do? Would not God forgive him?"

"That is a subject for later consideration. If you will take my advice you must do it with all your heart, and be as busy as I will be. We want no altercation with him just yet."

"I give you my word, Reggie, that for two years I will do as you advise. Then we will reconsider the question."

Then Reginald clasped her hand, and drew her

CHRISTINE

to his side. "It is for your salvation, dear, every way, and loneliness and deprivation may be for his good. We will hope so."

"You once liked him, Reggie."

"Yes, I did. He betrayed me in every way he could. He purposely quarreled with me. He wanted a free hand to follow out his own business ideas—which were not mine. But this is now idle talk. Neil will never be saved by people helping him. He must be left to help himself."

"That is hope enough to work on. Tell me now, exactly what to do."

Reginald's plans had long been perfected, and by the noon of the third day the beautiful home was nothing but bare walls and bare floors. That same night, Reginald Rath and his sister left Glasgow by the midnight train, and the following morning, Bruce Kinlock, with his wife and five children, moved into the dismantled house, and in two days it was in a fairly habitable condition. There was, of course, confusion and a multitude of bustling servants and helpers, and a pretty, frail-looking little lady, sitting helplessly in a large chair, and Bruce ordering round, and five children in every place they ought not be, but there was universal good temper, and pleasurable excitement, and a brilliantly lighted house, when on the following Saturday night, Neil drove up to his residence.

He thought, at first, that Mrs. Ruleson had a dinner party, then he remembered Roberta's rever-

ROBERTA INTERFERES

ence for the Sabbath, and knew she would not permit any dancing and feasting so near its daybreaking. The Sabbath observance was also his own strong religious tenet, he was an ardent supporter of Doctor Agnew and his extremist views, and therefore this illumination in the Ruleson mansion, so near to the Sabbath-day, offended him.

"Roberta knows that I am particular about my good name, and that I am jealously careful of the honor of the Sabbath, and yet—yet! Look at my house! It is lit up as if for a carnival of witches!" Then he hurried the cab man, and his keys being in his hand, he applied the latch-key to the lock. It would not move it, and the noise in the house amazed him. He rang the bell violently, and no one answered it. He raged, and rang it again. There was plenty of movement in the house, and he could plainly hear a man's voice, and a guffaw of laughter. He kept the bell ringing, and kicked the door with his foot.

Then a passionate voice asked what he wanted.

"I want to get in. This is my house."

"It is not your house. It never was your house."

"What number is this?"

"Twenty-three, Western Crescent. What Tom-fool asks?"

"This is my house. Open the door, or I will call the police." He did call the policeman on the beat, and the man said, "A new family moved in yesterday, Sir, and I was taken from Hillside Crescent,

CHRISTINE

only two days ago. I am on the night watch. I havena seen any o' them yet, but there seems to be a big lot o' them."

"Do you know where the family went, who lived in twenty-three previous to this new tenant?"

"I heard they went abroad—left in a great hurry, as it were."

Then Neil went back to the house, and rang the door bell with polite consideration. "The new-comers will certainly know more than the policeman," he thought, "and I can get no letter till Monday morning. It will be very annoying to be in this doubt until then."

He had plenty of time for these reflections, for the bell was not noticed, and he rang again with a little more impetuosity. This time it was answered by a huge Highlander, with a dog by a leash, and a dogwhip in his hand; and Neil trembled with fear. He knew the man. He had once been his lawyer, and lost his case, and the man had accused him of selling his case. There was no proof of the wrong, none at all, and it was not believed by anyone except Reginald Rath, and even Roberta allowed he was too prejudiced to be fair. These circumstances passed like a flash through Neil's heart, as Bruce Kinlock glared at him.

"How dare you show your face at my door?" he asked. "Be off, you whippersnapper, or I'll set the dog on you."

"I have always believed, until the present mo-

ROBERTA INTERFERES

ment, that this was my house. Can you tell me where my family has removed to?"

"You never had any right in this house but the right of sufferance. Honest Reginald Rath has taken your wife away—he's done right. Ye know well you are not fit company for the lady Roberta. As for your family, they have the pity of everyone. What kind of a brute is it that has not a shilling for a dying mother, though he's owing his family ninety pounds, and far more love than he deserves. Go, or it will be worse for you! You sneaking ne'er-dowell."

Kinlock had spoken with inconceivable passion, and the very sight of the red-headed, gigantic Highlander, sputtering out words that cannot be written, and of the growling brute, that only required a relaxed hand to fly at his throat, made him faint with terror.

"I am sure, Mr. Kinlock——"

"How daur you 'mister' me? I am Kinlock, of Kinlock! You had better take yourself off. I'm at the end of my patience, and I cannot hold this kind of a brute much longer. And if he grabs any kind of a human being, he never lets go while there's life in him. I can't say how he would treat you—one dog does not eat another dog, as a rule." Then he clashed to the door, and Neil was grateful. He did not ask again for it to be opened.

He went to his office. Perhaps there was a letter for him there. It was locked, and the man who kept

CHRISTINE

the keys lived over the river. Thoroughly weary and distressed, and full of anxious forebodings, he went to a hotel, and ordered supper in his own room. He did not feel as if he could look anyone in the face, with this dreadful uncertainty hanging over his life. What was the matter?

Thinking over things he came to no conclusion. It could not be his few words with Roberta on the night of his return from London. A few words of contradiction with Roberta were almost a daily occurrence, and she had always accepted such offers of conciliation as he made. And he was so morally obtuse that his treatment of his mother and sister, as influencing his wife, never entered his mind. What had Roberta to do with his mother and Christine? Suppose he had treated them cruelly, what right, or reason, had she to complain of that? Everything was personal to Neil, even moralities; he was too small to comprehend the great natural feelings which make all men kin. He thought Kinlock's reference to his dying mother a piece of far-fetched impertinence, but he understood very well the justice of Kinlock's personal hatred, and he laughed scornfully as he reflected on the Highlander's longing to strike him with the whip, and then set the dog to finish his quarrel.

"The Law! The gude Common Law o' Scotland has the like o' sic villains as Kinlock by the throat!" he said triumphantly. "He wad hae set the brute at my throat, if he hadna kent it wad put

ROBERTA INTERFERES

a rope round his ain red neck. I hae got to my Scotch," he remarked, "and that isna a good sign. I'll be getting a headache next thing. I'll awa' to bed, and to sleep. Monday will be a new day. I'll mebbe get some light then, on this iniquitous, unprecedented circumstance."

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTINE MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

Now, therefore, keep thy sorrow to thyself and bear with a good courage that which hath befallen thee.—Esdras ii, ch. 10, v. 15.

Be not afraid, neither doubt, for God is your guide.—Esdras i, ch. 16, v. 75.

IT was a cold winter day at the end of January, and a streak of white rain was flying across the black sea. Christine stood at the window, gazing at her brother's old boat edging away to windward, under very small canvas. There was a wild carry overhead, out of the northeast, and she was hoping that Norman had noticed the tokens of the sky. Margot saw her look of anxiety, and said: "You needna worry yoursel', Christine. Norman's boat is an auld-warld Buckie skiff. They're the auldest model on a' our coasts, and they can fend in a sea that would founde a whole fishing fleet."

"I noticed Norman had lowered his mainsail and hoisted the mizzen in its place, and that he was edging away to windward."

"Ay, Norman kens what he must do, and he does it. That's his way. Ye needna fash anent Norman,

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

he'll tak' his old Buckie skiff into a gale that yachts wi' their lockers fu' o' prizes wouldna daur to venture."

"But, Mither dear, there's a wind from the north blowing in savage gusts, and the black seas tumble wild and high, and send clouds of spindrift to smother the auld boat."

"Weel, weel! She'll give to the squalls, and it's vera near the turn o' the tide, then the wind will gae down, as the sea rises. The bit storm will tak' itsel' off in a heavy mist and a thick smur, nae doubt o' it."

"And Norman will know all this."

"Ay, will he! Norman is a wonderfu' man, for a' perteenin' to his duty."

Then the door opened, and one of the Brodie boys gave Christine two letters. "I thought ye wad be glad o' them this gloomy day," he said to Christine.

"Thank you, Alick! You went a bit out o' your road to pleasure us."

"That's naething. Gude morning! I am in a wee hurry, there's a big game in the playground this afternoon." With these words the boy was gone, and Christine stood with the letters in her hand. One was from Cluny, and she put it in her breast, the other was from Roberta, and she read it aloud to her mother. It was dated New Orleans, and the first pages of the letter consisted entirely of a description of the place and her perfect delight in its climate and social life.

Margot listened impatiently. "I'm no carin' for

CHRISTINE

that information, Christine," she said. "Why is Roberta in New Orleans? What is she doing in a foreign land, and nae word o' Neil in the circumstance."

"I am just coming to that, Mither." Then Christine read carefully Roberta's long accusation of her husband's methods. Margot listened silently, and when Christine ceased reading, did not express any opinion.

"What do ye think, Mither?"

"I'll hae to hear Neil's side, before I can judge. When she was here, she said naething against Neil."

"She did not name him at all. I noticed that."

"Put her letter awa' till we get Neil's story. I'll ne'er blame my lad before I hae heard his side o' the wrang. I'm disappointed in Roberta. Wives shouldna speak ill o' their husbands. It isna lawfu', and it's vera unwise."

"The faults she names are quite in the line o' Neil's faults."

"Then it's a gude thing he was keepit out o' the ministry. The Maraschal was gude enough. I'm thinking all the lad's faults are quite in the line o' the law. Put the letter awa'. I'm not going to tak' it into my consideration, till Neil has had his say-so. Let us hae a good day wi' a book, Christine."

"So we will, Mither. I'll red up the house, and read my letter, and be wi' you."

"Some wee, short love stories and poems, and the like. That verse you read me a week syne,

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

anent the Lord being our shepherd, is singing in my heart and brain, even the now. It was like as if the Lord had but one sheep, and I mysel' was that one. Gie me my crochet wark, and I will listen to it, until you are through wi' your little jobs."

The day grew more and more stormy, but these two women made their own sunshine, for Margot was now easy and pleasant to live with. Nothing was more remarkable than the change that had taken place in her. Once the most masterful, passionate, plain-spoken woman in the village, she had become, in the school of affliction and loss, as a little child, and the relations between herself and Christine had been in many cases almost reversed. She now accepted the sweet authority of Christine with pleasure, and while she held tenaciously to her own likings and opinions, she no longer bluffed away the opinions of others with that verbal contempt few were able to reply to. Her whole nature had sweetened, and risen into a mental and spiritual region too high for angry or scornful personalities.

Her physical failure and decay had been very slow, and at first exceedingly painful, but as her strength left her, and her power to resist and struggle was taken away with it, she had traveled through the Valley of the Shadow of Death almost cheerfully, for the Lord was with her, and her own dear daughter was the rod that protected, and the staff that comforted her.

CHRISTINE

They had a day of wonderful peace and pleasure, and after they had had their tea, and Margot had been prepared for the night, Christine had a long sweet session with her regarding her own affairs. She told her mother that Cluny was coming to see her anent their marriage. "He really thinks, Mither, he can be a great help and comfort to us baith," she said, "and it is but three or four days in a month he could be awa' from the ship."

"Do you want him here, dearie?"

"It would be a great pleasure to me, Mither. I spend many anxious hours about Cluny, when the weather is bad." And Margot remembered how rarely she spoke of this anxiety, or indeed of Cluny at all. For the first time she seemed to realize the girl's unselfish love, and she looked at Christine with eyes full of tears, and said:

"Write and tell Cluny to come hame. He is welcome, and I'll gie ye baith my blessing!" And Christine kissed and twice kissed her mother, and in that hour there was a great peace in the cottage.

This concession regarding Cluny was the breaking down of Margot's last individual bulwark. Not by assault, or even by prudence, was it taken. A long service of love and patience made the first breach, and then Christine's sweet, uncomplaining reticence about her lover and her own hopes threw wide the gates, and the enemy was told to "come hame and welcome." It was a great moral triumph,

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

it brought a great satisfaction, and after her surrender, Margot fell into a deep, restful sleep, and Christine wrote a joyful letter to Cluny, and began to calculate the number of days that must wear away before Cluny would receive the happy news.

A few days after this event Christine began to read to her mother "Lady Audley's Secret," and she was much astonished to find her sleepy and indifferent. She continued in this mood for some days, and when she finally threw off this drowsy attitude, Christine noticed a very marked change. What had taken place during that somnolent pause in life? Had the silver cord been loosed, or the golden bowl broken, or the pitcher broken at the fountain? Something had happened beyond human ken, and though Margot made no complaint, and related no unusual experience, Christine knew that her spirit was ready to return unto God who gave it. And she said to herself:

"As I work, my heart must watch,
For the door is on the latch,
In her room;
And it may be in the morning,
He will come."

In the afternoon little Jamie came in, and Christine told him to go very quietly to his grandmother, and speak to her. She smiled when he did so, and slowly opened her eyes. "Good-by, Jamie," she

CHRISTINE

said. "Be a good boy, be a good man, till I see ye again."

"I will, Grandmother. I will! I promise you."

"What do you think o' her, Jamie?" asked Christine.

"I think she is dying, Auntie."

"Go hame as quick as you can, and tell your feyther to come, and not to lose a minute. Tell him he must bring the Cup wi' him, or I'm feared he'll be too late."

The Domine's voice roused Margot a little. She put out her trembling hand, and the likeness of a smile was on her face. "Is He come?" she asked.

"Only a few more shadows, Margot, and He will come. I have brought the Cup with me, Margot. Will you drink the Wine of Remembrance now?"

"Ay, will I—gladly!"

The Domine and Christine ate and drank the sacred meal with her, and after it she seemed clearer and better, and the Domine said to her, "Margot, you will see my dear old friend, James Ruleson, very soon now. Will you tell him I send him my love? Will you tell him little Jamie is my son now, and that he is going to make the name of James Ruleson stand high in the favor of God and man?"

"I'll tell him a' anent Jamie—and anent Christine, too."

"The dead wait and long for news of the living they love. Someway, sooner or later, good news

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

will find them out, and make even heaven happier. Farewell, Margot!"

Later in the evening there came that decided lightening which so often precedes death. Margot asked for Norman, and while he knelt beside her, she gave him some instructions about her burial, and charged him to stand by his sister Christine. "She'll be her lane," she said, "'til my year is gane by, and the warld hates a lone woman who fends for hersel'. Stay wi' Christine tonight. Tell Christine to come to me."

When Christine was at her side, she asked, "Do you remember the verses in the wee, green book?"

"Called 'Coming'?"

"Ay"—and she added very slowly the first few words she wished to hear—"It may be when the midnight——"

"Is heavy upon the land,
And the black waves lying dumbly
Along the sand,
When the moonless night draws close,
And the lights are out in the house,
When the fires burn low and red,
And the watch is ticking loudly,
Beside the bed.
Though you sleep tired out, on your couch
Still your heart must wake and watch,
In the dark room.
For it may be that at midnight,
I will come."

CHRISTINE

And then Norman said solemnly, "In such an hour as you think not, He will come."

About ten o'clock Christine caught an anxious look in her eyes, and she asked, "What is it, Mither, dear Mither?"

"Neill!" she answered. "Did ye send for the lad?"

"Three days ago."

"When he does come, gie him the words I send him. You ken what they are."

"I will say and do all you told me."

"But dinna be cross wi' the laddie. Gie him a fair hearing."

"If he is sorry for a' he has done——"

"He willna be sorry. Ye must e'en forgie him, sorry or not—Ye ken what the Domine said to me—when I spoke—o' forgiving Neil—when he—was sorry?"

"The Domine said you were to remember, that while we were yet sinners God loved us, and Christ died for us."

"Ay, while we—were—yet—sinners! that leaves room for Neil—and everybody else, Christine—Christine—I am weary, bairns—I will go to sleep now—gude night!"

Death had now become a matter of consent to Margot. She surrendered herself to her Maker, and bade her children "goodnight!"

Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
And now was quiet and now astir,

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

until God's hand beckoned her into His school of affliction. Now in the House not made with Hands she understands the meaning of it all.

The next week was a particularly hard one to Christine. In the long seclusion of her mother's illness, and in the fascination which study now had for her, the primitive burial rites of Culrairie were an almost unbearable trial. Every woman who had ever known Margot came to bid her a last earthly farewell. Some cried, some volubly praised her, some were sadly silent, but all were alike startled by the mighty change that affliction and death had made in the once powerful, handsome, tremendously vitalized woman, who had ruled them all by the sheer force of her powerful will and her wonderful vitality. Pale and cold, her raven hair white as snow, her large strong hands, shrunk to skin and bone, clasped on her breast, and at rest forever—they could hardly believe that this image of absolute helplessness was all that was left of Margot Ruleson.

For three days the house was always full, and Christine was troubled and questioned on every hand. But for three days long a little brown bird sat on a holly tree by her window, and sang something that comforted her. And the sweet, strong song was for her alone. Nobody else noticed it. She wondered if they even saw the little messenger. On the afternoon of the third day, the Domine, standing at the head of the coffin, spoke to the

CHRISTINE

men and women who filled the house. His eyes were dim with tears, but his voice had the strong, resonant ring of a Faith that knew it was well with the dead that die in the Lord. It was mainly to the living he spoke, asking them solemnly, "What does the Lord require of you? Only this service—that you do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."

Then Margot's sons, Norman and Eneas, lifted the light coffin. The Domine walked in front of it, and all the men present followed them to the open grave, in the old kirk yard. In Scotland women do not go to the grave. Christine locked herself in her room, and the women mourners gradually returned to their homes.

That night she was quite alone, and she could give free outlet to her love, and grief, and hope. She felt her mother in every room. She could not believe she had gone far away. At times, walking about the desolate house, she called her mother with passionate weeping again, in the soft low voice that she had used when soothing her pain and weariness. At length even her superb vitality gave way, and she fell upon her bed in a comforting, restorative sleep.

Morning found her ready and able to face the new life. She rose with the dawn, ate her breakfast, and then lifted the hardest duty before her. This was to brush and carefully fold away Margot's last simple clothing. Margot herself had

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

cared for her one silk dress, her bits of lace, and the beads and rings and combs of the days of her health and vanity. Christine had seen her face wet with tears as she locked them in the trunk, and had kissed those tears away with promises of renewed life. But there was no one with her to kiss away the tears she shed over the simple gowns of Margot's last hard days. As she was doing this loving duty, she thought of the angels folding up neatly the simple linen garments in which Christ had been buried. With such thoughts in her heart, oh how lovingly she stroked the plain cotton gowns, and the one black merino skirt, that had made up Margot's last wardrobe. Her tears dropped over them, and she turned the key with a little cry so heart-broken that no doubt her angel wept with her.

"Oh Mither, Mither!" she cried, "how little had ye for a' the days o' your hard, sorrowfu', painfu', fifty-five years—for a' your loveless girlhood—for a' your wifely watchings and fearings for feyther on the stormy seas—for a' your mitherhood's pains and cares—for the lang, cruel years you were walking i' the Valley o' the Shadow o' Death—for a' the years o' your hard, daily wark, loving and tending your six sons and mysel', feeding, dressing, and makin' us learn our catechism and our Bible verses—curing fish, and selling fish, makin' nets, and mending nets, cooking and knitting and sewing. Surely the good Master saw it all, and will gie you His 'well done,' and the wage ye hae earned."

CHRISTINE

The bits of crochet work that her mother's trembling fingers had made—her last work one little table mat unfinished—had a strange sacredness, and a far more touching claim. She took these to her own room. "They hold Mither's last thoughts. They seem a part o' her. I'll never lose sight o' them while I draw breath o' life. Never!" And she kissed and folded them up, with the dried rose leaves from Margot's garden.

Then she stayed her tears, and looked round the disordered house. Everything was out of its proper place. That circumstance alone made her miserable, for Christine was what her neighbors called a "pernickity" housekeeper. She must have a place for everything, and everything in its place. Until she had her home in this precise condition, she resolved to take no other trouble into consideration. And simple and even derogatory as it appears to be, nothing is more certainly efficacious in soothing grief, than hard physical labor. It took her two days to put the cottage in its usual spotless condition, and during those two days, she gave herself no moment in which to think of any trouble before her.

She knew well that there must be trouble. Her mother's burial money, put away twenty-nine years previously, had proved quite insufficient for modern ideals and modern prices. She was nearly out of money and there would be debts to meet, and every debt would be to her like a wolf baying round the

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

house. That was one trouble. Cluny was another. She knew he would now urge an immediate marriage, and that his plea would have an appearance of extreme justice. She also knew that he would be supported by Norman, whose wife had long set her heart on occupying the Ruleson cottage. That was a second trouble. The third was Neil. He had been immediately notified of his mother's death, and he had taken no notice of the event. The other boys not present, were all at sea, but where was Neil?

These things she would not yet permit her mind to consider.—In fact, the tossed-up, uncleanly house, dulled her faculties. She could not think clearly, until all was spotless and orderly. Then she could meet trouble clear-headed and free-handed. However, on the third evening after her mother's burial, every corner of the house satisfied her. Even her dusters and cleaning-cloths had been washed and gone to their special corner of the kitchen drawer; and she had felt, that afternoon, that she could comfortably arrange her paper and pencils on the table of her own room.

She was eager to write. Her heart and brain burned with the thoughts and feelings she longed to express. "Tomorrow," she said to herself—"Tomorrow, I shall go on with my book." Three months previously she had begun a story to be called "A Daughter of the Sea," but lately she had been obliged to lay it aside. She found "the bits o' poetry,"

CHRISTINE

were all she could manage in the short intervals of time that were her own.

My readers may reflect here, on the truth that there is no special education for a writer. The man or woman who has anything to say to the world, brings the ability to declare it with him. Then all the accidents and events of life stimulate the power which dwells in the heart and brain, and the happy gift speaks for itself. Christine had been making up poetry ever since she could remember, and while yet a child had been the favorite story-teller in all the social gatherings at Culrairie. And it is not unlikely that a good story-teller may turn out to be a good story-writer.

About one-third of her first novel, "A Daughter of the Sea," was completed, and now, with a happy resolution, she sat down to finish it. She did not have the material to seek, she had only to recollect and write down. The day passed with incredible swiftness, and early in the evening Norman opened the door, and saw her sitting by the fire. Her hands were clasped above her head, and there was the shadow of a smile on her still face.

"O Norman!" she cried, "how glad I am to see you! Nobody has been here since——"

"I know, dear. Folks hae thought it was the kinder thing to stop away, and let you get the house in order."

"Maybe it was. Come in, and see it, now that everything is in its place."

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

So Norman went through all the large, pleasant rooms with her, and he could not help a sigh, as he contrasted them with his own untidy and not over-cleanly house. Then they returned to the ordinary living-room, and when they were seated, Norman lit his pipe, and they talked lovingly of the mother who had gone away, and left her earthly home full of sweet memories. They spoke in soft, tender voices. Christine wept a little, and smiled a little, as she told of her mother's last days, and Norman's mouth twitched, and his big brown eyes were heavy with unshed tears.

After this delay, Norman put away his pipe, and bending forward with his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands, he said, "Christine, I hae brought you a message. I hated to bring it, but thought it would come more kindly from my lips, than in any ither way."

"Weel, Norman, what is it? Who sent you wi' it?"

"My wife sent me. She says she will be obligated to you, if you'll move out o' the Ruleson cottage, as soon as possible. She is wanting to get moved and settled ere the spring fishing begins. These words are hers, not mine, Christine. I think however it is right you should know exactly what you hae to meet. What answer do you send her?"

"You may tell her, Norman, that I will ne'er move out o' the Ruleson cottage. It is mine as

CHRISTINE

long as I live, and I intend to hold, and to live in it."

"Jessy has persuaded hersel' and a good many o' the women in the village, that you ought to marry Cluny as soon as he comes back to Glasgow, and go and live in that city, so as to make a kind o' a home there, for the lad. There was a crowd o' them talking that way, when I came up frae the boat this afternoon, and old Judith was just scattering them wi' her fearsome words."

"Norman, I shall not marry until a year is full o'er from Mither's death. Mither had the same fear in her heart, and I promised her on the Sacred Word, which was lying between us at the time, that I wouldna curtail her full year o' remembrance, no, not one minute! That is a promise made to the dead. I would not break it, for a' the living men in Scotland."

"They were talking of Cluny's rights, and——"

"Cluny hes no rights but those my love gives him. I will not marry for a year, at least. I will not live in Glasgow. I will bide in my ain hame. It suits me fine. I can do a' the writing I want to do in its white, still rooms. I can see wee Jamie here every day. I am out o' clash and claver o' the village folk. I can watch the sea and the ships, and feel the winds, and the sunshine, and do my wark, and eat my morsel in perfect peace. Na, na, the auld hame suits me fine! Tell your wife Christine Ruleson will live and die in it."

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

Norman did not move or speak, and Christine asked anxiously, "Do you wish me to leave Culrairie, and go to Glasgow, Norman?"

"No, I do not! Your wish is mine, and if Mither were here today, I know she would scorn any proposal that brought Jessy here. She never liked Jessy."

"Her liking or disliking did not influence her will about the house. She loved every stone in this cottage, and above all she loved her garden, and her flowers. Tell me, Norman, if Jessy came here, how long would the house be in decent order? And where would Mither's bonnie flower-garden be, by the end o' the spring weather? For Mither's sake I'll tak' care o' the things she loved. They werna many, and they werna worth much, but they were all she had, for her hard working life, and her sair suffering. And she relied on you, Norman. She said in her last hours, 'If things are contrary, Christine, and you can't manage them, ca' on Norman, and nane else. Norman will stand by his sister, if a' the warld was against her.'"

"Ay, will he! Blood is thicker than water. We had the same Feyther and Mither. Nane better ever lived," and he stretched out his hand, and Christine clasped it, and then he kissed her, and went away.

Jessy was waiting for him. "Ye hae been a mortal lang time, Norman," she said. "I hae been

CHRISTINE

that narvous and unsettled i' my mind, I couldna even get a bite ready for ye."

"Weel ye be to settle yoursel' now, Jessy; for my sister has her mind fixed on the way she has set hersel', and naebody will be able to move her. Naebody!"

"Is she getting her wedding things ready?"

"She is going to wear blacks for the full year."

"There's nae occasion for her to cast them. She can put on a white gown for the ceremony. I suppose they will hae the Domine come to the house and marry them."

"You are going ayont a' probabilities, Jessy. Christine willna marry for a full year. I am not sure she will ever marry."

"She be to marry! Of course she'll marry! She canna mak' a leeving oot a' a few bits o' poetry! She be to marry! All women hae to marry. Where is she going to bide?"

"Just where she is."

"I'll not hear tell o' that. The house is yours. After the widow's death, the home comes to the auldest son. That's the law o' Scotland, and I'm vera sure it's the law o' England likewise. It's the right law. When folks break it, the break is for sorrow. There was Robert Toddie, who left his house and land to his daughter Jean, and she married her lad, and took him to live there—never heeding her brother's right—and baith her bairn and hersel' died within a twelvemonth, and sae Robert

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

cam' to his ain, and he's living in the Toddie house this day. Why dinna ye speak to me?"

"I hae heard ye tell the Toddie story till it's worn awa'."

"How was the house looking?"

"Clean and bright as a new-made pin."

"That's right! I'll just tak' the bairns and go up there! One room is a' she's needing, and I canna spare her that vera lang."

"You'll not daur to tak' a step up there. Ye hae no mair right there, than you hae in the school-master's house."

"I hae every right there. I hae got the best o' advice on the subject. I'm thinkin' the law stands aboon your opinion."

"Not even the law and the fifteen lords o' Edinburgh could gie you the right to put your foot on that place, in the way of the right. Christine is mistress o' Ruleson's, mistress and owner. That, and naething less!"

Norman was very unhappy. He could not get the idea of his right to Ruleson cottage out of his wife's mind, and he had understood from the laying of its first stone that the building was to be for a home for Margot and Christine as long as either of them lived. He had some sentimental feelings also about the place, for Norman was a dumb poet, and both in his brain and heart the elements of humanity were finely mixed. But he was reticent and self-denying, and the work of his hands being needed

CHRISTINE

by the rapidly increasing family, he had put forth no personal claims. Longing for knowledge and the wisdom of the schools, he had gone silently and cheerfully to the boats and lifted the oars at his father's side.

But the house he had helped to build was dear to him. The image of his grave, kind father still sat in the big chair by the fireside, and his mother's quick step, and cheerful voice, and busy household ways, were yet the spirit of the building. He loved its order and cleanliness, and its atmosphere of home and hospitality. Sitting by his fireside that night, he constantly contrasted it with his own disorderly, noisy dwelling, with his slip-shod wife, and her uncertain and generally belated meals. And his purpose was immovable.

During this silent session with himself, his wife never ceased talking. Norman was oblivious both to her entreaties and her threats. But as he rose and laid down his pipe, she laid her hand on his arm, and said, "Gudeman, ye hae heard what I hae said, and——"

"I hae heard naething since I told you that Christine was owner and mistress o' Ruleson cottage. Let be, Jessy, I'm weary and ready for sleep."

"You'll hear this word, and then ye may sleep awa' what little sense you hae left. I'll go the morn into the town, and see Lawyer Forbes, and you'll mebbe believe him when he serves Christine

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

wi' a notice to quit, and tak' her belongings—poems and a'—wi' her."

"If such a thing could happen, I should at once hae it deeded back to her, as a gift. Listen, woman, to my last word on this matter—if you could by any means get possession o' the house, ye would hae it from foundation to roof-biggings, all to yoursel'! Neither I, nor any o' my children, would cross its doorstane. That's a fact, as sure as death!"

"You couldna tak' my childer from me!"

"I could, and I would. Tak' your will, you foolish woman! I shall bide by every word I hae said."

"But Norman——"

"Let go! You hae never yet seen me in a blaze! Dinna try it tonight! If I lift my hand it will be your ain fault. Get out o' my sight, and hearing! Quick, woman! Quick! I'm no' able to stand you langer—O God! O God, help me!"

Jessy, cowed and shocked at this unexpected passion of a patient man, disappeared; but the next moment she was heard in the children's room, crying and scolding, and the sharp slapping of her hand followed. Norman jumped to his feet, his heart throbbed and burned, he clenched his hands, and took a step forward. The next moment he had sat down, his eyes were closed, his hands were clasped, he had hid himself in that secret sanctuary which his hard life and early disappointments had revealed to him, when he was only a lad of seventeen. Jessy's railing, the children's crying, his own angry voice, he

CHRISTINE

heard them not! He was hiding in His pavilion, in the secret of His tabernacle. He had cast his burden upon the Lord. He was in perfect peace.

Christine spent a restless, unhappy night. Norman had put before her a future that frightened her. She had seen the misery made by little wicked innuendoes half a dozen words long. Truly words could not kill her, but they could make life bitter and friendless, and there were women in the village she could neither conciliate, nor cope with, for the weapons they used were not in her armory. "Mither had a sharp tongue," she said softly, "but even she couldna cope wi' a lying tongue. Weel, there's words anent it, in the Good Book, and I'll seek them out, and they'll be helping me."

After all, the central trouble of her heart was neither her house, nor her neighbors, nor even her lover. Someway or other, they could and would be managed. But how was she to refill her empty purse? There was only one half-crown in it, and she had already found out the cruel uncertainty of literary work. It depended on too many people. Her novel was three-fourths done, but she reasoned that if men were so long on finding out whether they liked half a dozen verses, it would be all of a year, ere they got her novel well-examined. After realizing this condition, she said firmly, and with no evidence of unusual trial, "I can tak' to the fish, in the meantime. I havna outgrown my fisher dress, nor forgot my fisher-calls, and Culrairie folk will help me sell,

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

if I look to the boats for my bread. They dinna understand the writing business—nae wonder! There's few do! The Domine was saying it belongs to the mysteries o' this life. Weel, I'll get my pleasure out o' it, and the fish are ay sure to come, and sure to be caught, and if I set mysel' to the business, I can beat the auldest and youngest o' the fisherwomen in the selling o' them."

When she came to this decision, the clock struck twelve, and she looked up at its face for a moment, and shook her head. "I canna sleep yet," she said, "and you needna be calling me. There's Cluny and Neil to think o', and dear me, wha' can Neil be hiding himsel'? He canna hae heard o' Mither's death, he would hae come here, and if he couldna come, he would hae written. There has been nae word, either, from that lass he married. She wrote seven lang pages o' faults and accusations again her lawful husband, and then let the matter drop, as if it was of no further consequence. I didn't answer her letter, and I am glad I didn't. And I canna write now, for I know no more anent her whereabouts, than I do anent Neil's. I wouldn't wonder if they are together in some heathen country, where men fight duels, and kill each other for an ugly word. In a case like that, it would be fair murder for poor Neil. I wish I knew where the misguided lad is! Norman and Neil had no marriage luck, and wha kens what my luck may be, in the way o' a husband!"

CHRISTINE

This intensely personal reflection claimed her whole attention. It was long since she had seen Cluny. Shortly before her mother's death, he had gone as supercargo on a large merchant steamer, bound for New Zealand. It was a most important post, and he had been promised, if successful, the first captaincy in the fleet of passenger steamers carrying between England and the United States, that was vacant. Before leaving on this long trip to New Zealand, he had only managed to see Christine for three hours. He had reached Culrairie at eight o'clock. He had run like a deer the mile and quarter which lay between the railway station and the Ruleson cottage, reaching his goal just as Christine finished reading a goodnight psalm to her mother. She had heard his steps afar off, it had seemed as if the comforting words were read to them—then she was at the open door, and they met in each other's arms.

Three hours of pure, perfect happiness had followed. Cluny went first to Margot's side. He knew it was the last time he could ever stand there. In this world they would see each other no more, and he was sorrowfully shocked and touched by the change in the handsome woman, once so vibrant and full of life. Sometimes they had not been very good friends, but this white, frail image, stretching out hands full of pleasure and goodwill to him—this gentle mother of the beloved Christine, won in a moment all his best sympathies. He promised her

MISTRESS OF RULESON COTTAGE

everything she asked, and then she sent him away with her blessing.

So it had been three hours of marvelous happiness. They had been content to forget all things but the joy of each other's presence. To the last possible minute he had remained with her, and their hopeful farewell had not been dimmed by a single tear. Since that night, she had sent no anxious worrying thoughts after him. From every port at which his ship touched, he had written her long, loving letters, and now she was beginning to expect his return. Any day she might have a letter from him, dated Liverpool or Glasgow.

"Lat them talk," she said with a little defiant laugh. "Lat their tongues tak' their ain ill-way, I'm not feared. There's Norman at my side, and the Domine not far off, and God aboon us all. I'll speak to Norman anent the fishing, and if needs be, I can kipper the herring as weel as Mither did." Then in a moment a wonderful change came over her, the angry scorn of her attitude, and the proud smile on her handsome face vanished. She clasped her hands, and with the light of unconquerable love on her face, she said with tender eagerness—"What does she do now? Oh dear God, what is Mither doing now? I canna tell. I canna tell, but it is Thy will, I'm sure o' that." Then the loving tears that followed this attitude washed away all traces of her scorn and anger, and she lay down with prayer on her lips, and fell sweetly asleep.

CHAPTER XII

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

They that sin, are enemies to their own life.—Tobit, xii, 10.

But Thou sparest all, for they are Thine, O Lord, Thou Lover of Souls.—Wisdom of Solomon, xi, 26.

TOMORROW is always another day, always a new day, and as long as we live, always our day. It will bring us our little freight of good or evil, and we must accept it, our salvation being that we have the power of turning the evil into good, by the manner in which we accept it. When Christine awoke in the morning, she awoke all at once. No faculty of the Inner Woman dozed or lingered, every sense of the physical woman was attent, even sight—which often delays after its sister senses are conscious—promptly lifted its curtains, and Christine knew in a moment that she was *all there*, every sense and faculty alert, and ready for whatever the new day brought her.

She thought first of the trouble that Jessy was likely to make. "The maist o' the women will side wi' Jessy," she thought, "not because they like her, but because they dearly like a quarrel. I'll not

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

quarrel with them. I'll bide at hame, and if they come up here, I'll bolt the doors on them. That's settled. I can neither keep back, nor hurry forward Cluny, sae I'll just put him in God's care, and leave him there. Neil has ta'en himsel' out o' my kindness and knowledge, I can only ask God to gie his angel a charge concerning him. The great question is, how am I to get my bread and tea? There's plenty o' potatoes in the house, and a pennyworth o' fish will make me a meal. And I am getting a few eggs from the hens now, but there's this and that unaccountable thing wanted every day; and I hae just two-and-sixpence half-penny left. Weel! I'll show my empty purse to the Lord o' heaven and earth, and I'm not doubting but that He will gie me a' that is gude for me."

She put down her tea cup decisively to this declaration, and then rose, tidied her house and herself, and sat down to her novel. With a smile she opened her manuscript, and looked at what she had accomplished. "You tiresome young woman," she said to her heroine. "You'll hae to make up your mind vera soon, now, whether ye'll hae Sandy Gilhaize, or Roy Brock. I'll advise you to tak' Sandy, but I dinna think you'll do it, for you are a perfect daffodil o' vanity, and you think Roy Brock is mair of a gentleman than Sandy. I dinna ken what to do wi' you!——"

Here the door was noisily opened, and Jamie rushed in, crying "Auntie, Auntie! I hae three

CHRISTINE

letters for you, and one o' them came a week ago."

"Oh Jamie, why did you not go to the post office before this?"

"I was getting ready for my exam——"

"Gie me the letters, laddie."

"And I could not get off till this morning."

There was a long letter from Cluny, but it was not the delayed letter; and when Jamie had gone home, she gave her whole heart to the reading of it. Then she turned anxiously to the other two. Both of them contained small checks for poems written so long ago that she had quite forgotten them. They were, however, veritable godsend, and she thanked God for them. Now she could go to work. She could even take time to make her foolish heroine do the proper thing. She felt as rich, with her two pounds, as if the two had been twenty. And Cluny was on his way home! Her letter had been posted at Auckland, and he was about to leave there, for home, when he wrote.

The novel now progressed rapidly. It was writing itself, and "The Daughter of the Sea" was all the company Christine wanted. Norman came up the hill once in the day, or he sent his son Will, in his place, and Jamie always ate his lunch beside Aunt Christine, and sometimes Judith called to see if there was any news of Cluny. Sunday was her day of trial. Ill-will can make itself felt, and never say a word, and Christine noticed that everyone

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

drew away from her. If Judith, or Peter Brodie, or anyone spoke to her, they were at once set apart. Everyone else drew away, and the very girls to whom she had been kindest, drew furthest away.

It was, perhaps, a good thing for her. She only drew the closer to God, and her pen was a never-failing friend and companion. The days flew by, in the nights she slept and dreamed, and now and then the Domine came in, and comforted and strengthened her. Then she read him little chapters from her book, and he gave her much good advice, and sufficient praise to encourage her. So week after week went on, and though the whole village really disapproved of her retaining the Ruleson cottage, she nearly forgot the circumstance. And the book grew and grew in beauty, day by day, until on one lovely June afternoon, the pretty heroine married Sandy Gilhaize, and behaved very well ever afterward.

The Domine came in and found her flushed and excited over the wedding, and the parting, and he took the book away with him, and told her he would look after its sale, and she was to worry no more about it. "Try and forget it exists, Christine, then neither your wishing nor your fearing will interfere with the fortune your good angel intends for it."

"I am going to gie the house a good clean, frae the roof to the doorstep," she answered, "and when I hae that business on hand, it is all I can think about."

CHRISTINE

"Is not cleaning the house again a work of super-erogation?"

"I dinna ken what kind o' wark that may be, Sir, but Mither always cleaned the house weel, before the herring came. She'll be expecting me to do the same thing."

So the Domine took away the manuscript, and Christine cleaned her house with even extra care, and one night a week afterwards, she sat down to her cup of tea, telling herself that there wasna a speck o' dust from the roof to the doorstane. "Even the knives and forks shine like siller," she said, "and the bath-brick board wouldna file the cleanest duster." She was personally in the same spotless condition, and the little scone, and bit of baked fish, and the cup of tea on the snow white tablecloth, only emphasized this sense of absolute purity.

As she was drinking her tea, Norman lifted the latch and entered, and she greeted him joyfully. "Come awa' and welcome," she cried. "I was just longing to see you. Bring a cup and saucer off the rack, laddie, and sit down, and tell me what's going on in the village."

"Weel, the great news is the nearness o' the her-rin'. From a' accounts we may hae them in our bay in a week."

"I am glad o' the news."

"I dinna think you would be carin'."

"Why shouldn't I care? I am longing to mak'

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

some money. I intend to tak' up my mither's kippering."

"I'm glad o' that. Why should ye let it slip through your fingers? I heard tell that Nancy Baird was thinking o' taking Mither's place."

"She'll do naething o' that kind. Mither took pains to fit me for that wark, and I am going to do it wi' all my might. Norman, what can you do to mak' it easy for me?"

"That is what I came here to talk to you about. I'll tell Willie he is your gillie, as it were, for the fishing. He will carry the fish to the shed for you, and dinna forget Mither's cubby there is yours! Feyther paid for the space, and put up all the fixtures. If they werna named in the will, and there is any question of my right in the matter, say, I hae given it to you."

"But the kippering shed and fixtures were named and given to Mither and mysel', and——"

"They are yours. Let no one put you oot o' your right. Willie will bring the feesh to you—the finest I hae in my nets—and when they are kippered, he'll go to the town wi' you, and carry your basket."

"That is all I need, Norman, and I am vera gratefu' for your kindness."

"And I'll be walking through the shed, to see that a' is right. And if anything is beyont you, sister, you'll send Willie for me."

Christine could not speak, but she put her hand in his, and the look on her lovely face filled his eyes

CHRISTINE

with tears. "You are wonderfu' like Mither this afternoon, Christine," he said softly. And both were silent a little while. When he spoke next, it was of Neil—"Hae ye had a word frae the lad yet?" he asked.

"Not one, nor from the lass he married. I don't know what to think."

"Weel, it is as easy to think good, as evil. If we dinna thing wrang, we won't do wrang. Thinking no evil! That is what the Good Book advises. The puir lad was spoiled i' the making. If he comes back to any o' us, he will come back to you, Christine. There was the son, wha left his hame, in the gospels—ye ken how he was treated?"

"Whenever Neil comes hame, Norman, he will hae a loving welcome from Christine."

"The puir lad made a mistake wi' his marriage. That is the warst of a' mistakes. No man wins o'er it. It is the bitter drop in a' he eats and drinks, it is the pebble in his shoe, whether he warks or plays. Neil willna come hame till sorrow drives him here—then?"

"I'll do all that love can do, Norman."

"And call on me, if you think it needfu'."

The very next day Christine went to see her mother's customers. The idea of Nancy Baird's stepping into her mother's shoes was intolerable. "I'll not thole a thing like that! It settles the question to me! If I didna need the money, I would kipper the herrin', but I'm needing the money, and

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

the herrin' are my lawfu' venture." So to the town she went, and even far exceeded her usual orders. She was much elated by her success, and immediately began to prepare her mother's place for the work before her. It caused much talk in the village, but it prevented the Baird woman's taking unauthorized possession of Christine's place in the curing-shed.

Then while she was waiting and watching for the fish, she got a letter from Cluny. He was at home again. He was coming to Culrairie on Saturday. He would be there by noon, and he would remain in Culrairie until Monday night. She was full of joy, and instantly began to prepare for her visitor. It was Friday morning, and she had but little time, but that little was enough if things went with her. First she went to the village and asked Judith to come and stay with her, until the following Tuesday, and the old woman was delighted to do so. "We will hae Cluny to oursel's then," she said, "and I'll tak' the house wark off your hands, Christine, and you and Cluny can hae the time for your ain talk and planning."

"And man nor woman can say nae ill word anent Cluny visitin' me, if you are here."

"Lat them say their pleasure. They'll say naethin' oot o' the way, while I am here. They ken better."

"Why not?"

"Because I hae promised ane and all o' them

CHRISTINE

to call a church session the first ill word I hear. I will hae their names read out frae the pulpit—christened name and surname—and then they will be oot o' communion wi' the kirk, till they confess their sin, standing up in the congregation, and asking to be forgiven. Will ye think o' Sally Johnson, and Kitty Brawn, and a' that crowd o' sinful women making such a spectacle o' themsel's! Gar! It makes me laugh." And she laughed, as women of the natural order do laugh, and such laughing is very contagious, and Christine laughed also, as she gurgled out, "You never would do a thing like that, Judith?"

"Wouldn't I? Lat them try me."

"The Domine wouldn't do it."

"He couldna help himsel'. It is in the 'Ordering o' the Kirk.' He wad be forced to call the session, and I wouldn't won'ner if he rayther liked the jarring occasion. He dislikes insulting women, and why shouldn't he like to gie them a galling withstanding. It wad be vera desirable i' my opinion."

Cluny had said, in his letter, that his next voyage would be the last before their marriage, and that he would have to sweeten the next half year with the memories of his coming visit. So Christine killed her young, plump, spring chickens, and saved all her eggs, and provided every good thing she could for her expected lover.

The next three days were days taken out of this work-a-day world, and planted in Paradise. Every

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

thing appeared to unite to make them so. Judith looked after the house, the lovers wandered in the hill side garden. They were lovely days, green, shot with gold, and the whole sweet place was a caress of scent. The roses in Margot's garden were in their first spring beauty, and the soul of a white jasmine vine, that surrounded the spot, breathed of heaven. The larkspurs stood around like watchful grenadiers. Lilies and pansies were at their feet, and the laburnum hung its golden droops above them. All the day long, the sea was blue and calm, and the waves seemed to roll themselves asleep upon the shore. At night, there was a full moon above the water, and in its light the projecting rigging of some ships lying on it looked like spider webs on the gray firmament. The sun, and the moon, and the sea were all new, and the whole world was their own.

Talk of their marriage no longer made trouble, for Christine now sweetly echoed his hopes and his dreams. She had said "on the fifteenth of next April, or thereabouts," and Cluny seized and clung to the positive date. "Let it be the fifteenth," he decided. "I cannot bear 'thereabouts,' or any other uncertainty."

"The fifteenth might fall on a Sunday."

"Then let it be Sunday. There can be no better day;" and Christine smiled and lifted her beautiful face, and he wanted to give her a thousand kisses. For nearly three days all the ancient ecstasies

CHRISTINE

of love and youth were theirs. I need say no more. The morning redness of life and love has once tinged us all.

Judith went home the following day. Nothing less than the joys and sorrows and contentions of the whole village, were sufficient for her troubled and troubling spirit. Judith had everyone's affairs to look after, but she gave the supremacy of her attention to Cluny and Christine. Christine, she said, was a by-ordinary girl. She had written a poem, and got gude siller for it, and there wasna anither lass in Culrairie, no, nor i' the hale o' Scotland, could do the same thing.

Christine's first employment was to put her house in perfect order, then she took out her old fisher dresses, and selected one for the work before her. She hoped that her effort to take her mother's place in the kippering shed would put a stop to the fisherwives' opinion that she was "setting hersel' up aboon them a'." She longed for their good will, and she had no desire whatever to "tak' her mither's outstanding place," a fear of which intention some of the older women professed.

Her first visitor was her brother Norman. He put a stop at once to all her good and kind intentions. "You mustna go near the kippering," he said. "I hae heard what must put a stop to that intent. The herrin' are near by, and may be here tonight. If so be, I will send my lad, Willie, to the foot o' the hill wi' your feesh, by five o'clock in the morn-

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

ing. He will carry your basket easy, and do your bidding in a' things. Gae yer ways to the town, and cry your feesh, and you'll hae the siller in your hand when you come hame."

"Why can I not kipper my fish, Norman?"

"It isna worth while tellin' ye. God alone understands quarrelsome women, but if you go to the kippering-shed, there will be trouble—and trouble for me, Christine—for Jessy is in wi' them."

"I will do as you tell me, Norman. Hae thè fish ready at six o'clock."

Then Norman went away, and Christine put back in its place the kippering suit, and took out her very prettiest selling suit. For her mourning dress touched only her domestic and social life, her business had its own dress, and the fisher dress was part of the business. She had no sense of humiliation in assuming it, nor yet in the selling of the fish. She had liked very well the little gossip with known householders, and had not been offended by the compliments she received from strangers and passersby. The first morning of this new season was really a little triumph. All her old friends wanted to hear about Margot's sickness and death, and when her basket was empty, she sent Willie home and stayed with an old friend of her mother's, and had a cup of tea and a fried herring with her.

They had much to talk about, and Christine resolved to stay with her until the mail should come in, which would be about eleven o'clock. Then if

CHRISTINE

there was any letter for her, she could get it at once. "The Domine is aye thoughtless anent the mail," she reflected, and then with a little laugh added, "he hasna any love letters coming, or he would be thinking on it."

She received two letters. One was a letter from Cluny, mailed at Moville, Ireland. The other was from Blackwood's Publishing House, offering her a hundred and fifty pounds advance, and ten per cent royalty for her novel, or, if she preferred it, three hundred and fifty pounds for all rights. She went to the Domine with this letter, and he advised her to accept three hundred and fifty pounds for all rights. "You will be requiring bride-dresses, and house-napery of many kinds," he said, "and, my dear girl, God has sent you this check. He knew you would have need of these things. You ought to be very happy in this thought."

"I am, Sir. You know how 'just enough' has been my daily bread; and I was worrying a little about wedding garments, and expenses."

"Well, Christine, of all life's fare, God's daily bread is best. Answer your letter here, and I will mail it for you. In a few days you will have plenty of money. Go at once, and put it in the bank."

"I will, Sir. And when I get home, I will begin another book at once."

"Go with the fish, until you have the money in your hand. Things unforeseen might happen to delay payment. Good Fortune does not like us to

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

be too sure of her. I have seen her change her mind in that case."

"You are always right, Sir. I will do as you say."

"In three days you may expect the money. Do your work as if you were not expecting it. Miss nothing of your duty."

So Christine went the second morning, and had extraordinary success. Among the "Quality Houses" they were watching for her. They had never before seen such fine, and such fresh fish. They would have no others. She went home with her little purse full of silver, and her heart singing within her. It was not, after all, so bad to be a fishergirl. If it was all small money, it was all ready money. And the people who had known her mother had remembered her, and spoken kindly of her, and Christine loved them for it. She had not yet forgotten. Oh no! Many times in the day and night she cried softly, "Mither! Mither! Where are ye? Dinna forget Christine!"

On the third morning she had a little adventure. She was delaying, for she was waiting for the mail, and had taken a cup of tea with her mother's old friend. She stood in the doorway talking, and Christine was on the sidewalk, at the foot of the steps. Her empty basket was at her feet. She stood beside it, and the sunshine fell all over her. Its searching light revealed nothing but a perfection of form, a loveliness of face, and a charm of

CHRISTINE

manner, that defied all adverse criticism. She looked as the women of that elder world, who were the mothers of godlike heroes, must have looked.

Suddenly her friend ceased her conversation, and in a low hurried voice said,

"Here comes the young master, and his bride! Look at them."

Then Christine turned her face to the street, and as she did so, a carriage passed slowly, and Angus Ballister looked at her with an unmistakable intention. It was a stern, contemptuous gaze, that shocked Christine. She could make no response but sheer amazement, and when the carriage had passed it required all her strength to say a steady "good-morning" to her friend, and hurry down the road homeward. Not then, and there, would she think of the insult. She put it passionately beneath the surface, until she reached her home, and had locked herself within its shelter. Then, she gave way utterly to her chagrin and sorrow, and wounded pride, and wept such bitter, cruel tears, as no other sorrow had ever caused her. She wept like a wounded child, who knows it has been cruelly treated, who comprehends the injustice of its pain and its own inability to defend itself, and finds no friend or helper in its suffering.

Finally, when perfectly exhausted, she fell asleep and slept till the sun set and the shadows of the night were on sea and land. Then she arose, washed her tear-stained face, and made her tea. In her

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

sleep she had been counseled and comforted, and she looked at the circumstance now with clear eyes.

"I got just what I deserved," she said bluntly to herself. "Why did I go to the fishing at all? I wasna sent there. God took me awa' from the fishing, and showed me what to do, just as He took King David from the sheep-cotes, and made him a soldier. If David had feared and doubted, and gone back to the sheep-cotes, he wouldna hae been King o' Israel. Weel, when God took the nets out o' my hands, and told me to sing, I got feared singing and story-telling wouldna feed me, and I went back to the nets. Now then, Christine, thank God for the snubbing you got. Yesterday I knew money was coming, plenty o' it. Why didn't I sit still or go to the wark He wants me to do. Why? Weel, if I must tell the bottom truth, I rayther fancied mysel' in my fisher dress. I was pleased wi' the admiration I got baith frae the men and the women. Something else, Christine? Ay, my Conscience, if I be to tell all, I liked the gossip o' the women—also the pride I had in my ain strength and beauty, and the power it gave me o'er baith men and women—ay, and I liked to mak' the siller in my ain fingers, as it were—to say to folk, 'here's your fish,' and then feel their siller in the palm o' my hand. I was wrang. I was vera wrang. I wad be served as I deserve, if thae book people went back on their word."

Just here the Domine and Jamie came, and the

CHRISTINE

Domine had the letter with the money in it. Then he noticed that she had been crying, and he asked, "Who has been hurting you, Christine?" and she answered:

"Myself, Sir. I have been hurting myself." Then while he drank a cup of tea, she told him the little circumstance, which even yet made her draw her shoulders together, with a gasp of bitter chagrin.

"Christine, you will remember that I told you it was they who waited patiently on the Lord, who received His blessing. Are you satisfied now?"

"Oh, Sir! Do not ask me that question. You know I am satisfied."

"Then put this money in the bank, and go to work with all your mind, and all your soul. Being a woman you cannot preach, so God has chosen you for the pen of a ready writer. Say all that is given you to say, whether you get paid by the handicrafters, or not. God will see that you get your wages. Goodnight! You may let the bit Ballister affair slip out of your mind. The young man isn't naturally bad. He is ashamed of himself by this time. No doubt of it."

These things happened at the beginning of the herring season, and for two months Christine had a blessed interval of forgetfulness. Every man, woman and child, was busy about the fish. They had no time to think of the lonely girl, who had begun, and then suddenly abandoned the fishing—nobody knew what for. But they saw her in the

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

kirk every Sabbath, apparently well and happy, and old Judith said she had nae doubt whatever that Cluny had forbidden her to hae any pairt in the clash and quarreling o' the women folk in the herrin' sheds, and why not? Cluny would be a full captain, wi' all his trimmings on, when he came to Culrairie next April for his wife, and was it likely he would be wanting his wife cryin' feesh, and haggling wi' dirty, clackin' women, for a few bawbees? Christine was a lady born, she said, and her Cluny would set her among the quality where she belonged. Judith had no doubt whatever that Christine was obeying an order from Cluny, and Jessy Ruleson said she was glad the lass had found a master, she had always had too much o' her ain ill way.

For nearly three months Christine lived a quiet, methodical life, undisturbed by any outside influence, and free from all care. She rose very early, finding creative writing always easiest before noon. She went to bed very early, knowing that the sleep before midnight is the renewing sleep, and she hemmed the day, night and morn, with prayer, to keep it from unraveling. All that could happen between these two prayers was provided for, and she gave herself heart and soul to the delightful toil of story-writing. She wrote as she felt. She used the dialect and idioms of her people when it was necessary, and no one checked her for it. It was her style, and style is the stamp of individual intellect, as language is the stamp of race. Certainly

CHRISTINE

it is an habitual deviation from accuracy, but it is a deviation for the purpose of communicating freedom and feeling. The pen is neither grammar nor dictionary, its purpose is to be the interpreter of the heart.

One morning in September she had a strange feeling of inability to work. The fog dulled her mind. Nothing was firm and certain in her ideas. She found herself dreaming of incoherent and mysterious things, a woof of thought, as airy as the fog itself. "I'll put the paper and pencil awa'," she said, "and I'll build up the fire, and make some good bread, then if I am no mair awake I'll red up the house. There's dust on everything and little wonder if there's dust on my mind, too." Then someone tried to open the door and she called out, "Wait a wee! I'll slip the bolt in a minute." When she had done so, she opened the door and Neil, in a low broken voice said, "Christine! Let me in! Why am I bolted out?" and he whimpered out the words, like a hurt child, as he passed her.

She looked at him in amazement. She could hardly believe her own senses. This was not her brother—a wan, trembling man, with the clothing of a laborer, and his hair clipped close to his head.

"Bolt the door again," he said, in his old authoritative way, "and give me something to eat. I am sick with hunger, and cold, and misery of all kinds."

"I'll do all that, Neil, but where hae you been

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

this lang time, and what makes you sae poor, and sae broken down?"

"Get me something to eat, and I will tell you."

So she left him crouching over the fire, with his elbows on his knees, and his face hidden in his hands. And she asked him no more questions, but when he had had a good meal, he said, "You asked where I had been, Christine? I hae been in prison—in the House of Correction. I was put there by that villain Rath, who accused me of obtaining money under false pretenses."

"I feared something of the kind. A man came here a short time before mother died——"

"Mother dead!"

"Ay, going on eight months now."

And he cried out like some hurt animal, and Christine hasted to say, "She left her love and her blessing. At the very last, she spoke o' you, Neil."

"The man you were speaking of, what did he say?"

"He asked me for the particulars o' my loan to you. He pitied me, and said you had a way o' getting money on vera questionable pretenses."

"Well, what then?"

"I said you made no pretenses to me, that you didna even ask me to lend you money, that I offered it to you, and refused a' bond, or acknowledgment, and only bid you pay me when money was easy wi' you. And I took the liberty o' calling him a sneaking scoundrel, and something else I'll not say o'er

CHRISTINE

again. Then I wrote, and told you the entire circumstance, and you never answered my letter."

"I never received it. Rath wanted to leave Scotland, and the case was fairly rushed through. I was stunned. I think I lost my senses. I did get a lawyer, but I am sure Rath bought him. Anyway, I lost the case, and before I realized the situation, I found myself in prison for six months. I was made to work—look at my hands—I had dreadful food, dreadful companions. I was ill all the time. And when at last I was set free, someone had claimed my fine clothing, and left me these shameful rags."

"Oh Neil! dear Neil! Had you no money?"

"My lawyer charged me shamefully—literally robbed me—and I spent a great deal while in prison in getting proper food, and any comfort I could, at any price. After I got free, I was very ill in the hospital, and more went, and I have only enough left to pay my passage to America. I walked most of the way here. I'm a broken, dying man."

"You are naething o' the kind. All men mak' mistakes, a good many hae a stumble on the vera threshold o' life, and they leap to their feet again, and go prosperously ever afterward. You hae made a mistake, you must master it, you hae had a sair stumble, and you are going to leap to your feet, and run the rest o' your life-race to a clean, clear victory. The first thing is your claes. I am going at once to the Domine. You are about his size. I will get a suit, and some clean linen from him."

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

"Oh Christine, he may tell——"

"The Domine betray you! What are you saying?"

"I can't trust anyone but you."

"But you must."

"Finlay knows my size and measure, exactly."

"Vera well, then go to Finlay."

"How can I go through the town, or even the village, in this dress? You will hae to go for me."

"I will go to the Domine. It is impossible for me to go and buy a man's full suit at Finlay's. He is a great talker. He wad want to ken why and wherefore I was buying a man's suit—you ought to think o' this, Neil. I'll ask Norman to go."

"Norman will hae to tell that silly fool he married."

"Then I had better go to the Domine. He willna cheep o' the matter to anyone. Keep the doors bolted while I am awa', and go to your own old room. It is a' ready for you."

Only half satisfied with these arrangements, he went fretfully to bed, and Christine went as quickly as she could to the manse. The Domine listened to her story with an air of annoyance. "I know Neil's story," he said, "and he has told it as far as his telling goes, as truthfully as I expected. I am not so sure about his need of money, the clothing is different. I will send over what is necessary, and call in the afternoon and see him."

"Dinna be cross wi' the lad, Sir. He is sair

CHRISTINE

broken down," and suddenly Christine covered her face and began to cry with almost a child's complete surrender to circumstances. The Domine soothed her as he would have soothed a child, and she said, "Forgie me, Sir, I had to give way. It is a' by now. I'm not a crying woman, you know that, Sir."

"I do, and I am the more angry at those who compel you to seek the relief of tears. But I'll be as patient as I can with Neil, for your sake, and for his father's and mother's sake."

So Christine returned and Neil was difficult to awaken, but he heard her finally, and opened the door, in a half-asleep condition. "So the Domine refused you?" he said—"I thought he would."

"He did not refuse me. He will send, or bring, what you need, later."

"You should hae brought them with you, Christine. I dislike to be seen in these disreputable rags. You should hae thought o' that."

"I should, but I didna."

Then she cooked dinner, and he sat beside her, and told, and retold the wrongs and sufferings he had innocently endured. It was all Reginald Rath he blamed, and he would not admit that his behavior had been in any way provocative of it. "He was furious because I married his sister, and naturally took the management of her money into my own hands."

"Where are the Rathes now?"

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

"I do not know. Somewhere in California, I suspect."

"Why?"

"My wife has a good deal of real estate there. It was of little value when deeded to her. Its worth has increased enormously. Rath hated the idea of it belonging to me."

"Neil, how does Roberta feel toward you?"

"She was angry as he was at first—but she loved me."

"Why do you not go to her?"

"I do not know where she is."

"Why not go to California?"

"I have not money enough. Whatever set you to writing books, Christine?"

"How do you know I have been writing books?"

"I saw a review of a book by Christine Ruleson. It praised the bit novel a good deal—Did you get much for it?"

"They paid me vera weel."

"How much?"

She hesitated a moment, and then said, "Three hundred and fifty pounds."

"That is a deal of money for a book—I mean a storybook, like a novel. I did not know writing novels paid so well, or I would have chosen it, in place of the law."

"The Domine thinks writing as a profession must choose you, that you cannot choose it."

CHRISTINE

"The Domine does not know everything. Have the men who bought it paid you yet?"

"The publishers? Yes, they paid upon acceptance."

"How did you learn to write?"

"I never learned. I just wanted to write, and I wrote—something in me wrote. My writing is neither here nor there. Go to your old room, and lie down and sleep. The Domine may think it best for you to go somewhere at once."

So Neil went to his room but he could not sleep, and about four o'clock the Domine called for him. They met very coldly. The Domine had long ago lost all interest in him as a scholar, and he resented the way in which Neil had quietly shuffled off his family, as soon as he supposed he had socially outgrown them. The young man was terribly humiliated by the necessity of appearing in his dirty, beggarly raiment, and the Domine looked at him with a pitying dislike. The physical uncleanness of Neil was repellent to the spotless purity which was a strong note in the minister's personality. However, he thought of the father and mother of Neil, and the look of aching entreaty in poor Christine's face quite conquered his revulsion, and he said, not unkindly, "I am sorry to see you in such a sad case, Neil. You will find all you need in that parcel; go and dress yourself, and then I shall be waiting for you." He then turned quickly to Christine, and

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

Neil found himself unable to offer any excuse for his appearance.

"Poor Neil!" sighed Christine.

"Yes, indeed, poor Neil," answered the Domine. "What can man do for a fellow creature, who is incapable of being true, and hardly capable of being false?"

"I advised him to go to his wife. He says she loved him once, but turned against him at her brother's request."

"She did, and a wife who cries out has everyone's sympathy."

"She will forgive him—if she loved him."

"She may, I have known women to go on loving and trusting a man found out in fraud—only a woman could do that."

"A man——"

"No!"

"Oh, Domine, for father's sake—you loved father—for his sake, be kind to poor, despairing Neil."

"Yes, child, 'despairing'—that is, because he knows he is wrong, and is not sorry for his fault. A good man in the presence of any misfortune stands up, feels exalted, and stretches out his arms to the Great Friendship—he never drifts like a dismayed ship."

Here Neil entered the room again, looking very respectable in the new tweed suit which the Domine had brought him. "Does it fit you, Neil?" he asked.

"As if made for me, Sir. I thank you for it."

CHRISTINE

"It was altered for you. Finlay knew your measure to a quarter of an inch, he said. I told him you were not fit to come."

"Was that prudent, Sir?"

"Yes, for we are going away at once."

"I would like to rest with Christine for a few days."

"How can you think of such a thing? Do you want to ruin your sister as well as yourself? Do you not know that Rath is going to sue you as soon as your first sentence is served, for shortage in his money account? He will keep up this prosecution, if you stay in this country."

"What can I do? What can I do?"

"You must go to the United States, or Argentine, or India, or——"

"I have no money to spend in travel."

"How much have you?"

"Thirty pounds—and a little over."

"H-m-m! I will lend you twenty pounds, if you will repay it."

"Certainly, I will repay it. I will go to New York. I shall have a little left, when I get there, I suppose. I shall have to travel decently."

"You can get a comfortable passage for twelve pounds. With the balance you can make a spoon, or spoil a horn. Many a good man has built a fine fortune on less than forty pounds."

"I can spare fifty pounds, Sir. I will gladly give it."

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

"You cannot spare it. You need every shilling of it, and as I have said—fifty pounds will make a man, or waste a man. Any Scotchman with youth, education, and fifty pounds, feels sure of his share of the world, or he is not worth his porridge."

"You forget, Sir, that I have the bonds of a false charge to fight."

"The charge was not false. Do what is right, in the future, and I promise you that it shall never more come up against you. But if you go on buying money with life and honor, you will have a second charge to meet. I know whereof I speak. I have had several interviews with Mr. Rath. He is my half-sister's nephew. He will do anything reasonable I ask of him."

"My God! And you let me go to prison, and blasted my good name, and made a beggar and a wreck of me. I won't have your help," and he turned to Christine, and cried out passionately, "Christine! Christine! Save me from a friend like this! Help me yoursel', dear lassie! Help Neil yoursel'! For Mither's sake help Neil yoursel'."

She went quickly to his side. She put her arms round him—her white, strong, motherly arms. She kissed his face, and wept with him, and she said with a loving passion, all those soft, cruddling, little sentences with which a mother soothes a hurt child. "I'll gie you a' the siller you want, dearie. I'll gie it to you as a free gift. I'll stand by ye through thick and thin. Guilty or not guilty, ye are my ain

CHRISTINE

dear brither! I don't believe you're guilty! You are feyther's son, ye couldna be guilty. It's a' spite, and envy, and ill will. Mither bid me be kind to you, and I will be kind, though all the world's against me!"

The Domine watched this scene with eyes full of tears, and a tender fatherly look. He finally put his elbow on the table, and rested his face in his hand, and no doubt he was praying for counsel. For he presently stood up, and said in a kind, familiar voice, "Neil, we must hurry, we have a little journey before us, if you get the next Atlantic steamer. We will talk this matter fairly out, when we are alone. It is cruel to force it on your sister. She knows, and you know also, that you may safely put your trust in me."

Then Christine left the room, and when she returned the two men were ready to leave the house. "Where are you taking Neil, Domine?" she asked, in that lowered voice Fear always uses. "Where are you taking my brother?"

"Only to Moville, Christine. There may be spies watching the outgoing steamers—especially the American Liners—so he had better go to Moville, and take his passage from there."

She did not answer. She bent her tearful, loving face to Neil's, and kissed him again, and again, and whispered hurriedly—"Write to me often, and soon," and when her hand unclasped from his, she left with him the money she had promised. The

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

Domine pretended not to see the loving transaction, and the next moment the two men were wrapped up in the thick darkness, which seemed to swallow up even the sound of their footsteps.

That night Christine mingled her lonely cup of tea with tears, but they were tears that had healing in them. Those to whom love has caused no suffering, have never loved. All who have loved, have wept. Christine had given away her heart, it had been bruised and wounded—but ought she to love her brother less, because he had proved himself unworthy? If anything could bring him back to her trust, would it not be the prayers and tears born from her desolation? To regret, and to desire, between these two emotions the horizons recede; they are two spiritual levers, by which the soul can work miracles of grace.

So the days went on in alternating sunshine and storm. The Domine or Jamie came every day to see if all was well with her. Sometimes Norman stopped long enough on an evening visit, to talk about Neil and to wonder over his past and future. For though he had reached New York safely, they knew little of his life. He said he had found a clerkship in the general store of a merchant in a small town on the Hudson River, about sixty miles from New York; but he intimated it was only a resting place, till he felt ready to go to California. His great anxiety was to obtain the knowledge of his wife's hiding-place, for he was sure her brother was

CHRISTINE

determined to keep them apart. And this conviction was gradually making a reconciliation with her the chief aim and desire of his unhappy life. He was sure the Domine knew where she was, and his letters to Christine urged on her constantly a determined effort to induce him to reveal her residence. Christine had made three efforts to win the Domine's confidence, and had then abandoned the attempt as utterly useless.

The herring-fishery with all its preparatory and after duties and settlements was now quite past, and the school was in full swing again, and the quiet days of St. Martin's summer were over the land. All the magnificent flowers of early autumn were dead, but the little purple daisy of St. Michael filled the hedges, and the crannies of the moor. In the garden, among the stones of its wall, the mint and the thyme and the wall flowers still swung in sunny hours, faint ethereal perfume; but it was like the prayers of the dying, broken and intermittent, the last offering of the passing autumn. There were gray and ghostly vapors in the early morning, and the ships went through them like spirits. The rains sobbed at the windows, and the wind was weary of the rain. Sometimes the wind got the best of both fog and rain, then it filled the sails of the ships, and with swelling canvas they strutted out with the gale.

In the mornings, if the sea was willing, she saw the fishermen hastening to the boats, with their oilskins over their arms, and water bottle swinging at

NEIL'S RETURN HOME

their sides. And it was the sea after all, that was her true companion. The everlasting hills were not far away, but they were young compared with the old, old, gray sea. Its murmur, its loud beat of noisy waves, its still, small voice of mighty tides, circling majestically around the world, all spoke to her. Her blood ran with its tide, she wrote best when they were inflowing. When it was high water with the sea, it was high water with Christine's highest nature, spiritual and mental. Their sympathy was perfect, and if taken away from the sea, she would have been as miserable as a stormy petrel in a cage. So then, with the sea spread out before her, and her paper and pencils in hand, she hardly missed human companionship.

Still there were days when she wanted to talk, when singing did not satisfy her, and one morning when she had watched a boat come ashore, broadside on the rocks, she felt this need almost like a pain in her heart. No lives had been lost, and she had watched her brother Norman playing a god-like act of salvation with the lifeboat, yet she had what she called "a sair heartache!"

"It isna for the men," she said softly, "they are a' safe, through God's mercy, and Norman's pluck and courage. I think it is for the poor, poor boat, beaten and lashed to pieces, on thae black, cruel rocks! Poor Boatie! left alane in her misery and death! And she did her best! Nae doubt o' that! She did her best, and she had to die!"

CHRISTINE

Just then there was a knock at the door, and though she had a moment's wonder at anyone's coming up the hill, so early in such rough weather, she cried out, "Come in. Lift the hasp, and come in." Then she turned round to see who would enter. It was Roberta Ruleson.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

For the destiny whereof they were worthy drew them unto this end.—Wisdom of Solomon, xix, 4.

Mercifully ordain that we may become aged together.—Tobit, viii, 7.

The Bride of Love and Happiness!

ROBERTA RULESON was the last person in the world Christine expected to see. She came in smiling, and with outstretched hand said, "Dear Christine, tell me that you are glad to see me."

"There's nane living, Roberta, saving your ain husband, I would be gladder to see."

"I have sent the carriage away, can I stop with you this night?"

"You can stay as long as you want to stay. I will be gey glad o' your company."

"I have long looked for an opportunity to come to you. At last I pretended to be very sick with rheumatism, and had a famous physician to see me. Of course I had looked up the symptoms I had to complain of, and I succeeded in deceiving him. He was puzzled about my freedom from fever, but

CHRISTINE

I told him 'it came bad enough every third day,' and he said he would see me on the third day. My brother and his saucy wife left for Edinburgh yesterday, and they think I am safe in bed. I am safe here. I left Glasgow an hour after they did."

"Will you hae a cup of tea and a mouthful o' bread and broiled ham?"

"I am hungry and cold, and shall be very glad of it."

"Then go and tak' off your bonnet and cloak, and come to the fireside. I'll hae the food ready for you, in ten minutes."

Christine wanted a few minutes to consider. Was it right for her to tell Roberta all she knew, or must she follow the Domine's plan and be non-committal. She had not satisfied herself on this subject when Roberta returned to her, and she then hastily decided to do right and tell the truth whatever turned up. The tea and ham and bread were ready and Roberta sat down to them with the pleasant eagerness of a hungry child. She was, however, much changed. Her face showed plainly the wear and tear of a troubled, anxious mind, and as soon as she had taken a long drink of tea, she asked abruptly, "Christine, where is Neil?"

Then all Christine's hesitation vanished, and she answered frankly, "Neil is in a little town on the Hudson River, about a two hours' journey from New York."

"What is he doing?"

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

"He is bookkeeper in a shop there."

"What is the name of the town? Tell me truly, Christine."

"I will let you read his last letter. It came two days ago."

"Thank you! It would be a great comfort to me."

There was a John Knox teapot on the chimney-piece, and Christine lifted it down, removed the lid, and took Neil's letter out, and handed it to Roberta.

The woman's invincible sense of whatever was ridiculous or inconsistent, with a person or event, was instantly roused by the appearance of John Knox. She laughed with girlish merriment. "To think of John Knox interfering in my matrimonial difficulties!" she cried, "it is too funny! The old scold! How grim and gruff he looks! If he could speak, how he would rave about the outrageous authority of women. It is refreshing to know that he had a wife that snubbed him, and didn't believe in him, and did not honor and obey him, and——"

She had unfolded the letter as she was speaking, and now her eyes were so busy, that her tongue got no message to deliver, and this was what she read:—

MY DEAR SISTER CHRISTINE,

I am still here, waiting for the information I asked you to get me, namely the address of my dear wife. I am unhappy, I may say I am miserable; and I can never settle anywhere, till I see her. If she then refuses to hear and

CHRISTINE

believe me, life will be over to me. But she will believe me, for I will tell her the truth, and she will see that though I was foolish, I was not criminal. The law separating these two conditions is far from being clear enough. I want to know where my wife is! She will believe me! She will trust me! You do. Mother did. Roberta has been very near and dear to me. She has been forced to abandon me. It is the injustice of my treatment that is killing me. If I could only clear myself in her sight, I could lift life again, and make the best of it. I am not half content in this place. I cannot believe the people here are representative Americans, and I dislike small towns. Traders and dwellers in small towns are generally covetous—they have a sinister arithmetic—they have no clear notions of right and wrong, and I think they are capable of every kind of malice known to man. I want to go to a big city, where big motives move men, and if you do not send me Roberta's hiding place, I will put out for California, if I foot it every step of the way. I am stunned, but not broken.

Your loving brother,

NEIL.

When she had finished this letter, she was crying. "Give it to me!" she sobbed, "it is all about me, Christine. Give it to me! Poor Neil! He has been badly used! Oh Christine, what must I do?"

"You ought to go to his side, and help him to mak' a better life. What prevents ye?"

"Oh the shame of it! The atmosphere of the prison!"

"You promised God to tak' him for better or

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

worse, richer or poorer. You are breaking your promise every day, and every hour, that you stay away from him."

"You must not blame me ignorantly, Christine. My brother and I were left alone in the world, when he was ten years old, and I was eight. He at once assumed a tender and careful charge of my lonely life. I cannot tell you how good and thoughtful he was. When I left school he traveled all over Europe with me, and he guarded my financial interests as carefully as if they were his own. And I gave him a great affection, and a very sincere obedience to all his wishes and advice. At first he seemed to favor my liking for Neil, but he soon grew furiously jealous, and then all was very unpleasant. Neil complained to me. He said he did not want me to take my brother's opinion without saying a few words in his own behalf, and so I soon began to take Neil's side. Then day by day things grew worse and worse, and partly because I liked Neil, and partly because I was angry at Reginald, and weary of his exacting authority, I became Neil's wife."

"That was an engagement for a' the days of your life. You hae broken it."

"The law excused and encouraged me to do so."

"Were you happy in that course?"

"About as unhappy as I could be. I was sure Neil had been hardly dealt with, that advantage had been taken of his terror and grief, when he found

CHRISTINE

himself in prison. I am sure the lawyer he employed was really seeking Reginald's favor, and practically gave Neil's case away, but I was angry at Neil's want of spirit and pluck, in his own defense. Reginald told me that he cried in the dock, and I shed a few passionate tears over his want of courage and manliness."

"Poor Neil! If you had stood by him, he would have stood by himself. Remember, Roberta, that he was only just out of his college classes, and had had neither time nor opportunity to make friends; that his mither was dying, and that we had no money to defend him; that his wife had deserted him, and that he is naturally a man of little courage, and you will judge him very leniently."

"Reginald told me he was saving money in order to run away from me, and——"

"If he was saving money to run awa' with, he intended to take you with him. If he was going awa' alone, a few pounds would hae been all he needed. And it seems to me you were the runaway from love and duty. But it is little matter now, who was most to blame. Life is all repenting and beginning again, and that is everything that can be done in this case."

"I will start for New York tomorrow. Can you get Doctor Trenabie here for me?"

"Do you know him?"

"He is a distant relative both of the Raths and the Ballisters."

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

"He never said a word about his relationship, to me."

"It would have been most unlike him had he done so, but I can tell you, he wrote me before my marriage, and advised me to be very cautious with Mr. Neil Ruleson."

"I will send for him," said Christine, a little coldly, and then she drew the conversation towards the Raths and Ballisters. "Were they closely connected with Doctor Trenabie?" she asked.

"In a distant way," said Roberta, "but they are firm friends, for many generations."

"The Domine does not talk much about himself."

"No. He never did. He vowed himself early in life to chastity and poverty, for Christ's sake, and he has faithfully kept his vow. Old Ballister gave him the kirk of Culraine at fifty pounds a year, and when the death of his father made him a comparatively rich man, he continued his humble life, and put out all the balance of his money in loans to poor men in a strait, or in permanent gifts, when such are necessary. Reginald used to consider him a saint, and many times he said that if I was married to a good man, he would try and live such a life as Magnus Trenabie."

"Once I knew Colonel and Angus Ballister."

"I heard Angus lately boasting about his acquaintance with you—that is since your book has set the whole newspaper world to praising you."

"He is married. I saw him with his bride."

CHRISTINE

"A proud, saucy, beautiful Canadian, educated in a tip-top New York boarding school, in all the pronounced fads of the day. Now, I have seen New York girls of this progressive kind, and the polish being natural to them, they were not only dashing and impertinent, they were fascinating in all their dictatory moods. But this kind of polish is intolerable when laid over a hard, calculating, really puritanical Scotch nature. Such a girl has to kill some of her very best qualities, in order to take it on at all."

"She would be gey hard to live wi'. I wouldn't stay wi' her—not a day."

"Yet, I can tell you, both English and Scotch men are enslaved easily by this new kind of girl. She is only the girl of the period and the place, but they imagine her to be the very latest improvement in womanly styles. Now, I will astonish you. Reginald married the sister of Angus Ballister's wife. She is equally beautiful, equally impertinent and selfish, and she holds Reginald in a leash. She makes fun of my dowdy dress and ways, and of my antiquated moralities, even to my brother, in my very presence, and Reggie looks at me critically, and then at Sabrina—that is the creature's name—and says—'Roberta, you ought to get Brina to show you how to dress, and how to behave. You should just see Brina tread our old foggyish social laws under her feet. She makes a sensation in every room she enters.' And I answer pointedly—'I have no doubt

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

of it.' She understands my laugh, though Reggie is far from it. Of course she hates me, and she has quite changed Reggie. I have no longer any brother. I want to go and see if my husband cares for me."

"Of course he cares for you, more than for any other thing. Go to him. Mak' a man every way of him. Teach him to trust you, and you may trust him. Now go and sleep until the Domine comes, and he will tak' care of your further movements."

When the Domine came, he treated Roberta very like a daughter, but he would not hear her tale of woe over again. He said, "There are faults on both sides. You cannot strike fire, without both flint and steel."

"I have been so lonely and miserable, Doctor, since I saw you last. Reggie has quite deserted me for her."

"Well, then, Roberta, walk your lonely room with God, and humbly dare to tell Him all your heart."

"I never had any suspicion of Neil, until——"

"Roberta, women trust on all points, or are on all points suspicious."

"I trusted Neil, for as you know, he was under great obligations——"

"Obligations! Obligations! That is a terrible word. Love should not know it."

"If I had never met Neil——"

"You only meet the people in this life, whom you were meant to meet. Our destiny is human, it must come to us by human hearts and hands. Marriage

CHRISTINE

brings out the best and the worst a man or woman has. Let your marriage, Roberta, teach you the height and the depth of a woman's love. There are faults only a woman can forgive, and go on trusting and loving. Try and reach that height and depth of love. Then you can go boldly to God and say, 'Forgive me my trespasses, as I have forgiven those who trespassed against me.' What do you want me to do for you?"

"I want you, dear Doctor, to go and take the very earliest passage to New York that you can get. Any steamer and any line will do. Also I want you to go to the bank of Scotland, and tell them to transmit all my cash in their keeping to the bank of New York. Also, there is a trunk at Madame Bonelle's I want placed on the steamer, as soon as my passage is taken. It has a carefully chosen wardrobe in it. Brina thought it was full of dresses to be altered, according to American styles"—and this explanation of the dress episode she gave to Christine with a smile so comically illuminating, that the Doctor's smile perforce caught a gleam from it.

But he was in an authoritative mood, and he said, "What is your intention, Mrs. Ruleson? This is a singular order for you to give."

"Doctor, I am going to my husband. Christine has told me where he is. He loves me yet, and I want to go, and help, and comfort him."

"That is right. It is converting love into action. If this is not done, love is indolent and unbelieving.

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

It is not enough for Neil to love you, your love must flow out to him in return, or your married life will be barren as sand."

"I shall forgive him everything. He is longing to explain all to me."

"Forgive him before he explains. Have no explanations, they turn to arguments, and an argument is a more hopeless barrier than a vigorous quarrel, or an indignant contradiction. You do not want to judge whether he is right or wrong. The more you judge, the less you love. Take him just as he is, and begin your lives over again. Will you do this?"

"I will try."

"Roberta, you have a great work before you—the saving of a man—the lifting of him up from despair and ruin to confidence and hope, and success. He is well worth your effort. Neil has fine traits, he comes of a religiously royal ancestry, and true nobility is virtue of race. You can save this man. Some women could not, others would not, you can do it."

"I will do it, Sir, God helping me."

"Now I will go to Glasgow, and do all you require. You must take some money with you, the bank——"

"I have a thousand pounds in my purse."

"You extravagant woman!"

"Money is necessary, in saving souls, Sir."

"I believe you. Where shall I meet you in Glasgow?"

"At the Victoria Hotel—dinner at six."

CHRISTINE

To these words the Doctor disappeared, and Roberta began to amplify and explain and justify her position and her intentions. She talked to Christine, while Christine cooked their meals and did all the necessary housework. She begged her to lock the doors against all intruders, and then making herself comfortable in the large cushioned chair by the fireside, she took off her tight shoes, and divested her hair of all its pads, and combs, and rats, and with a sigh of relief said, "Now we can talk comfortably." They talked all day long, and they talked of Neil. A little later, she was eager to tell Christine all about her brother's unaccountable marriage. "I was really ashamed of the affair, Christine," she said. "No consideration for others, scarcely time to make the wedding-dress, and I think she asked everyone she saw to come to her marriage. She talked the slang of every country she had visited, and the men all thought it 'so funny' when she kicked up her dress with her heel, and treated them to a bit of London or New York slang. The perfectly silly and easy way in which men are caught, and tied fast, always amazes me, Christine. It is just like walking up to a horse's head, with a dish full of corn in one hand and a bridle in the other. This little Sabrina Wales walked up to Reginald Rath with a bit of London slang on her lips, and a wedding ring hid in the palm of her hand, and the poor man is her slave for life."

"Not necessarily a slave for life, Roberta."

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

"Necessarily. No remission. No redemption. The contract reads 'until death us part.'"

They discussed Sabrina from head to feet—her hair, her eyes, her complexion, her carriage, her way of dressing, her gowns—all short in front and long behind—"can you guess what for, Christine?"

"Perhaps she has pretty feet."

"She has very small ones. I do not know whether they are pretty or not. But the effect is striking, if you watch her from the front—you can't help thinking of a turkey gobbler."

The hours went happily enough, Christine enjoyed them. After her paper heroine, this all-alive, scornful, loving and hating, talking and laughing woman was a great pleasure. Christine baked delicious scones, and scalloped some fine oysters in bread crumbs and chopped parsley, and made one or two pots of Pekoe and Young Hyson tea, and they nibbled and sipped, and talked over the whole sacred druidical family of the Raths, even to Aunt Agatha, who was worth half a million pounds—"which I threw away for a good joke," said Roberta.

"Look at the clock, it is near midnight! We must go to bed."

"Well, then, I have had the loveliest day. I shall never forget it, and I will tell Neil all about it before long. Dear Christine, I am glad you are my sister, it lets me take nice little liberties with you; and you know, I love you, but that is inevitable. No one can help it."

CHRISTINE

When Roberta went, she seemed to take the sunshine with her. The summer of All Saints, and the melancholy of its long fine weather was over, and there was the touch of winter in the frosty nights and mornings, but for five weeks Christine heeded nothing but her new novel. For the time being, it fully absorbed her; and for the next few weeks she made great progress. Then one morning Norman came to see her. "Christine," he said. "I am in great trouble. Jessy is vera ill with scarlet fever, and I am anxious about the children."

"Bring them all here, Norman."

"They'll mebbe hinder you i' your writing."

"But what is my writing worth, when the children are in danger? Go and bring them here at once. Get Judith to come with them. With her help I can manage. I will come in the afternoon, and sit with Jessy awhile."

"No, you willna be permitted. The doctors say there are o'er many cases. They hae ordered the school closed, and they are marking every house in which there is sickness."

This epidemic prostrated the village until the middle of January, taking a death toll from the little community, of nearly eighty, mostly women and children. But this loss was connected with wonderful acts of kindness, and self-denial. The men left their boats and nursed each other's children, the women who were well went from house to house, caring tenderly even for those they supposed them-

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

selves to be unfriends with. If the fever triumphed over its victims, love triumphed over the fever. In the Valley of the Shadow of Death, they had forgotten everything but that they were fellow-sufferers. Christine's house had been a home for children without a home, and she had spent a great part of her time in preparing strengthening and appetizing food for those who needed it more than any other thing. No one, now, had a word wrong to say of Christine Ruleson. She had been a helping and comforting angel in their trouble, and if there had been a woman or child more suffering and destitute than all the rest, Christine had always taken her to her home. For in such times of sorrow, God reveals Himself to the heart, not to the reason. Oh, how far it is, from knowing God, to loving Him!

Well, then, Sorrow may endure for a night, but Joy cometh in the morning. And the mornings grew to be spring mornings, full of that sunshine that goes not only to the heart of man, but to the roots of every green thing. The silence of the receding hills was broken by streams glancing and dancing down the glens. The "incalculable laughter of the sea" was full of good promise, for those who had been sick, and for those who had perforce been long idle. The roar of angry billows was hushed, and it came up to the land, hard-edged with stiff, tinkling waves, and the convalescents rested on the shingles beside them, taking life with every breath, and enjoying that perfect rest that shingle knows

CHRISTINE

how to give, because it takes the shape of the sleeper, whether he be young or old, or short or long.

The days were of soft, delicate radiance, the nights full of stars. The moon in all her stages was clear as silver, the dawns came streaming up from the throbbing breast of the ocean. The springtime songs were bubbling in the birds' throats, they sang as if they never would grow old, and the honey bees were busy among the cherry blooms, delirious with delight.

Who speaks of sadness in such days?

Certainly Christine did not. All the troubles of the hard winter were past, and her heart was running over with a new joy. Cluny was coming home. Very soon, the long waiting would be over. This thought made her restlessly busy. Her home had to be renovated thoroughly. Altogether twenty-eight children had been sheltered for short or longer periods there, and they had all left their mark on its usually spotless walls and floors. Well, then, they must be cleaned—and men quickly appeared with lime and white paint, and women with soap and scrubbing brushes. And Christine went through the rooms, and through the rooms, with them, directing and helping forward the beautifying work.

She had also to think of her wedding-dress, and her wedding-breakfast, but these cheerful, lengthening days gave her time for everything. When the house pleased even her particular idea of what it ought to be, she turned to the garden. The seeds

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

of the annuals were sown, and the roses trimmed, and not a weed left in the sacred little spot.

Then day after day added to all this beauty and purity, and one happy morning Jamie brought *the* letter. Cluny was in Glasgow, and his letter was like the shout of a victor. He would be in Culrairie on Thursday—first train he could make—they would be married Saturday morning. Christine could not put him off any longer. He had been waiting twenty-one years—for he had loved her when he was only nine years old—and he had fulfilled every obligation laid on him. And now! Now! Now! She was his wife, his very own! there was no one, and no circumstance, to dispute his claim! and so on, in sentences which stumbled over each other, because it was impossible for humanity to invent words for feelings transcending its comprehension.

Christine laughed softly and sweetly, kissed the incoherent letter, and put it in her breast. Then she walked through the house and garden, and found everything as it should be. Even the dress in which she would meet her lover, with its ribbons and ornaments, was laid out ready to put on the next morning. Judith was in the kitchen. The wedding dress, and the wedding cake, would be brought home on Friday morning.

However, a woman, on such an occasion, wants to make the perfect still more perfect. She wondered if it would not be well to go and give her last direc-

CHRISTINE

tions and orders that afternoon, and finally decided to do so.

She was just leaving the baker's, when Colonel Ballister entered. He met her with respectful effusiveness, and asked permission to walk home with her. And as they walked to the village together, the Colonel said, "I spent four, long, delightful hours with Captain Macpherson last night. He is to be here tomorrow."

"I didna ken you was acquaint wi' him, Colonel."

"Mr. Henderson introduced me to him, and then asked us both to dinner. We had a delightful three hours at Henderson's, then the captain and I walked round and round the square for an hour, and we liked each other so well, that I got permission from him, to ask a great favor from you."

"I dinna see how I can favor you, Colonel, but if I can do sae, I'll be gey glad to do it."

"I want you to allow me to be present at your marriage ceremony. I shall never forget the supper I ate with your father and mother. I respected them both with all my heart, and I am one of the most enthusiastic admirers of your writing, and you must know and feel that I am your sincere friend."

"I do know it, Sir. I thank you for your kind words anent my dear feyther and mither; and I shall be a very proud and happy girl, if you will stand a few minutes by the side o' Cluny and Christine. It will be for our honor and pleasure!"

"Captain Macpherson asked me to call and see

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

him, and I will then find out your arrangements, and very proudly drop into them." Then he walked to the foot of the hill with her, and could not help noticing the school, from which at least eighty boys and girls were issuing with a shout and a leap for the playground. On this sight he looked pleasantly for a few moments, and then smiling at Christine said:

"Our enterprise! It appears to be attractive."

Not knowing just what reply to make, she smiled, and nodded, and gave him her hand. "Good-by, Christine! May I call you Christine? In a day or two it will not be permissible. May I say it until then?"

"Christine is my name. Call me Christine always."

"Captain Macpherson would have something to say to that."

"What for? He has naething to do with my name."

"The first thing he does, after you are his wife, is to change it."

"He can only change the family name. Every one o' us in the family has that name. It is common to all, far and near. Cluny can change that, and I hae no objections; but he wouldna daur to touch a letter of my christened name. That is my ain, as much as my hands and my eyes are my ain—ay, and a gey bit mair sae—for a man may claim the wark o' your hands, and the glint o' your e'en, but he canna

CHRISTINE

mak' use o' your name. It is o'er near forgery—and punishment. Sae I am Christine to yoursel' neither for wark, nor for use, but just for pure honest friendship—Christine, as lang as we baith wish it sae."

"Thank you, Christine. I am proud of the favor!"

Now I am beggared for words, when I come to try any description of Cluny's wonderful joy in the final fruition of his long-delayed hopes. When he landed, he was at first volubly happy. He told everyone he was going to be married. He expected everyone to rejoice with him. All his thoughts, words, and actions were tinctured with Christine. Men looked at him, and listened to him, with pity or envy, and one of the greatest of Glasgow's mercantile magnates cried out enviously—"Oh, man! Man! I would gie all I possess to be as divinely mad as you are—just for one twenty-four hours!"

But joy at its very deepest and holiest turns strangely silent. The words it needs have not yet been invented, and when Cluny was free of all duty, and could come to the very presence of his Beloved, he could say nothing but her name, "Christine! Christine!" almost in a whisper—and then a pause, a pause whose silence was sweeter far than any words could have been. Speech came later, in passionate terms of long and faithful love, in wonder at her beauty, ten-fold finer than ever, in admiration of her lovely dress, her softer speech, her gentler manner.

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

She was a Christine mentalized by her reading and writing, and spiritualized by her contact with the sick and suffering little children of the past months. Also, love purifies the heart it burns in.

Everything was ready for the marriage, and it was solemnized on Saturday morning in the Ruleson home. The large living room was a bower of fresh green things, and made gay and sweet with the first spring flowers. The marriage table was laid there also, but the Domine stood on the hearthstone, and on the very altar of the home in which Christine had grown to such a lovely and perfect womanhood, she became the wife of Captain Cluny Macpherson.

That day when Cluny came in to the bridal, he wore for the very first time his uniform as captain of the new steamer just finishing for him. For he had asked one great favor for himself, which was readily granted, namely, that his commission as captain be dated on his wedding day. So then he received his wife and his ship at the same time. The room was crowded with men and women who had known him from boyhood, and when he appeared, it was hard work to refrain from greeting him with a shout of "Welcome, Captain!" But it was the light of joy and admiration in Christine's face, which repaid him for the long years of working and waiting for this gloriously compensating hour.

The Colonel said he had the honor of assisting at the wedding of the handsomest couple in Scotland.

CHRISTINE

And it was not altogether an exaggeration. Christine in her white satin gown, with white rose buds in her golden hair, and on her breast—tender, intelligent, intensely womanly was the very mate—in difference—for Cluny, whose sea-beaten beauty, and splendid manhood were so fittingly emphasized by the gold bands and lace and buttons, which Jamie had once called “his trimmings.” He wore them now with becoming dignity, for he knew their value, because he had paid their price.

There was a crowded breakfast table after the ceremony. The Domine blessed the meal, and the Colonel made a flattering speech to the people of Culrairie—his people—he called them; promising them better water, and better sanitary arrangements, and another teacher who would look especially after the boys’ athletic games and exercises. During this speech the Captain and his bride slipped away to the train, in the Colonel’s carriage, and when it returned for the Colonel, the wedding guests were scattering, and the long-looked-for event was over.

Over to the public, but to the newly-wed couple it was just beginning. To them, the long, silent strings of hitherto meaningless life, were thrilling with strange and overwhelming melodies. Marriage had instantly given a new meaning to both lives. For the key to life is in the heart, not in the brain; and marriage is the mystical blending of two souls, when self is lost, and found again in the being of another. It was with them,

RIGHT MATE AND THE RIGHT TIME

That ever working miracle of God,
The green and vital mystery of love,
Still budding in the garden of the heart.

The wedding festivities over, all excitement about it quickly subsided. Christine would be sure to come back again, Cluny would return at stated periods, and always bring with him the air and flavor of lands strange and far off. Their farewells would always be short ones. Their presence would always be a benefaction. There was nothing to discuss, or wonder over, and the preparations for the herring season were far behind-hand. They could talk about the wedding later, at present the nets and the boats were the great anxiety in every house in the village. So Christine and Cluny with little observation,

Sailed happily into the future,
Wherever their wishes inclined them;
Love and Good Fortune as shipmates,
And Troubles always a mile behind them.*

* A fisherman's toast or blessing.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER MANY YEARS

Her life intensive rather than extensive; striking root downward, deep in the heart, not wide in the world.

A memory of dew and light, threaded with tears.

NOT long before the breaking out of the present European war, I was in London, and needed a typist, so I went to a proper Intelligence Office on the Strand, and left a request directing them to send any likely applicant to my hotel for a conversation. On the next afternoon I heard a woman's voice in an altercation with the bell-boy. I opened the door, and the boy said he could not quite make out the lady; he was very sorry indeed, but the lady would not explain; and so forth.

The lady looked at the premature little man with contempt, and said a few passionate words of such unmistakable Scotch, that I felt the bellboy to be well within the pale of excusable ignorance.

"Are you from the Intelligence Office?" I asked.

"Yes, Madam. At the request of Scott and Lubbock I came to see you about copying a novel."

AFTER MANY YEARS

"Come in then," and as soon as the door was closed, I offered my hand, and said only one word—"Fife?"

"Ay," she answered proudly, "Fife! I can speak good English, but the stupid lad made me angry, and then I hae to tak' to the Scotch. I don't hae the English words to quarrel wi', and indeed if you want a few words of that kind, the Scotch words hae a tang in them that stings like a nettle, even if folk cannot quite make out the lady or gentleman that uses them."

I could not help laughing. "What words did you use?" I asked.

"Naething oot o' the way, I just told him, in a ceevil manner, that he was a feckless, fashious gowk, or something or ither o' an idiotic make. He was just telling me he didn't speak French, when you opened the door," and then she laughed in a very infectious manner. "But this is not business, Madam," she said, "and I will be glad to hear what you require."

Our business was soon pleasantly arranged, and just then, very opportunely, my five o'clock tea came in, and I asked Miss Sarah Lochrigg to stay, and drink a cup with me, and tell me all about the Scotland of her day. "It is fifty years since I left Scotland," I said, "there will be many changes since then."

She took off her hat and gloves and sat down. "I come from a fishing village on the coast of Fife.

CHRISTINE

They don't change easily, or quickly, in a fishing village."

"What village? Was it Largo?"

"No. Culraine, a bit north of Largo."

"Never!"

"Ay, Culraine. Do you know the place?"

"I used to know people who lived there. Doctor Magnus Trenabie, for instance. Is he living yet?"

"No, he went the way of the righteous, twenty years ago. I remember him very well. He preached until the last day of his life, but he was so weak, and his eyesight so bad, that one of the elders helped him up the pulpit stairs, and another went up at the close of the service, and helped him down, and saw him safely home.

"One Sabbath morning, though he made no complaint, he found it difficult to pronounce the benediction, but with a great effort he raised his hands and face heavenward, and said every word plainly. Then he turned his face to the elder, and said, 'Help me home, Ruleson,' and both Ruleson and Tamsen took him there. He died sometime in the afternoon, while the whole kirk was praying for him, died so quietly, it was hard to tell the very time o' his flitting. He was here one minute, the next he was gone. In every cottage there was the feeling of death. He was really a rich man, and left a deal of money to the Ruleson school in Culraine village."

"Then Norman Ruleson is yet alive?"

AFTER MANY YEARS

"Ay, but his wearisome wife fretted herself into a grave a good many years ago."

"And the other Ruleson boys? Are they all alive yet?"

"I cannot tell. They were all great wanderers. Do you remember old Judith Macpherson?"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, her grandson married the only girl Ruleson, and they have ruled Culraine ever since I can remember. The Captain was very masterful, and after he was 'retired,' that was after he was sixty, I think, he lived at Culraine, and Culraine lived as much to his order as if they were the crew of his ship."

"Where did they live?"

"In the old house, but they built large rooms round about it, and put on another story above all the rooms. They made no change in the old part of the house, except to lift the roof, and insert modern widows. The new rooms were finely papered and painted and furnished, the old living room is still white-washed, and its uncarpeted floor is regularly scrubbed and sanded. The big hearthstone has no rug to it, and the rack against the wall is yet full of the old china that Mrs. Macpherson's mother used. All the Macpherson boys and girls were married in that room, just in front of the hearthstone, or on it. I do not remember which. The Captain's wife insisted on that part of the ceremony."

"Did you know the Captain's wife?"

CHRISTINE

"In a general way, only. She is very well known. She writes books—novels, and poems, and things like that. Some people admire them very much, most of our folks thought them 'just so-so.' I can't say I ever read any of them. My mother believed all books but the Bible doubtful. Domine Trenabie read them, and if you wanted Captain Macpherson's good will, you had to read them—at least, I have heard that said."

"Is she writing books yet?"

"Ay, she had one on the market last year. She did not write much while her children were growing up—how could she?"

"How many children has she?"

"I think eleven. I believe one died."

"What are you telling me?"

"The truth, all the truth, nothing but the truth. She has seven sons, and five girls. The youngest girl died, I heard."

"She is older than I am. Does she look older?"

"No. She looks younger. Her hair is thinner, as I can remember it, but pretty and bright, and always well dressed. I have seen her in her fisher's cap in the morning. In the afternoon she wears a rose and a ruffle of white lace, which she calls a cap. Her gowns are long and handsome, and she has beautiful laces, but I never saw any jewelry on her. Colonel Ballister gave her a necklace of small, but exceedingly fine India pearls, but nobody ever saw it on her neck. Perhaps she did not like to put them on."

AFTER MANY YEARS

People said he bought them for the girl he hoped to marry when he returned home. She married someone else."

"Yes, I know. She made a great mistake."

"Weel, young Angus Ballister made a mistake, too. His wife wouldn't live anywhere but in Paris, until the estate was like a moth-eaten garment. They had to come home, and she fretted then for California, but there wasn't money for anywhere but just Ballister. Mebbe there was some double work about the affair, for I ne'er heard tell of any scrimping in Ballister Mansion, and when he came to Culrairie he was free as ever with his siller and his promises—and he kept his promises, though some of them were the vera height of foolishness. He was thick as thack with the Macphersons, and the Captain and himsel' spent long days in Macpherson's boat, laying out, and pretending to fish."

"Why 'pretending'?"

"They never caught anything, if it wasn't a had-dock or a flounder, when the water was crowded with them, and when, as little Bruce Brodie said, 'the feesh were jumping into the boat, out o' each other's way.'"

"Did you ever hear anything of Neil Ruleson, who was a lawyer and went to America?"

"Never until I was a full-grown lassie. Then they came to pay a visit to Mrs. Macpherson. They are very rich. They have money, and houses, and land

CHRISTINE

beyond all likelihood, and just one sickly son to heir it all."

"Neil Ruleson's wife was the sister of a Mr. Reginald Rath. Do you remember anything of the Rathes?"

"Very little. Rath and Ballister married sisters. Rath's wife died in Rome, of fever. They had no children, and Rath went to Africa with General Gordon. I do not think he ever came back, for I heard my brother reading in the *Glasgow Herald*, that the two claimants to the Rath estate were likely to come to an agreement."

We were silent for a few moments, and then I said, "There is one more person I would like to hear of. He was only a lad, when I knew him, but a very promising one, a grandson of old James Ruleson, and called after him, though adopted by the Domine."

"I know who you mean, though he is now called Trenabie. There was something in the way of the law, that made it right and best for him to take his adopted father's name, if he was to heir his property without trouble. The Rulesons thought it fair, and made no opposition, and the lad loved the Domine, and liked to be called after him. So he was ordained under the name of Trenabie, and is known all over England and Scotland as Doctor James Trenabie."

"Why James? The Domine's name was Magnus."

"He would not have his Christian name changed.

AFTER MANY YEARS

He said he would rather lose ten fortunes, than touch a letter of his name. James had been solemnly given him in the kirk, and so written down in the Kirk Book, and he hoped in God's Book also, and he believed it would be against his calling and salvation to alter it. Folks thought it was very grand in him, but his Aunt Christine was no doubt at the bottom o' his stubbornness. For that matter he minds her yet, as obedient as if he was her bairn."

"Then he got the Domine's money?"

"The lion's share. The village and school of Cul-raine got a good slice of it, and King's College, Aberdeen, another slice, but Jamie Ruleson got the lion's share. He married the daughter of the Greek Professor in King's, and their first child was a laddie, who was called Magnus. Some are saying that his preaching isna quite orthodox, but rich and poor crowd any church he speaks in, and if you are going to Glasgow, you will hardly be let awa' without hearing him."

"How is that?"

"This one and that one will be asking you, 'Have you heard Doctor Trenabie preach? You'll never think o' going awa' without hearing the man?'"

A little later I heard him. Sarah Lochrigg had not said too much. I saw and heard a preacher by Grace of God—no cold, logical word-sifter, but a prophet inspired by his own evangel. He was full of a divine passion for heavenly things, and his eager, faithful words were illuminated by mystic

CHRISTINE

flashes, just as a dark night is sometimes made wonderful by flashes of electricity. The subject of his sermon was "Our Immortality" and his first proposition startled me.

"Before asking if a man has a future life, let us ask, 'is he living now?' The narrow gateway to the cities not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, is Conscience! If there is no Conscience, is there any soul?" From this opening he reasoned of life, death and eternity, with that passionate stress of spirit which we owe entirely to Christianity. The building seemed on fire, and it was difficult even for the reticent Scot to restrain the vehement, impetuous cry of the jailer at old Philippi—"What shall I do to be saved?"

Physically, his appearance was one well-fitting a Man of God. He looked worthy of the name. He was tall, and slenderly built, and when some divinely gracious promise fell from his lips, his face broke up as if there were music in it. He had the massive chin, firm mouth and large, thoughtful gray eyes of his grandfather Ruleson, and the classical air of a thoroughbred ecclesiastic that had distinguished Doctor Trenabie. Surely the two men who so loved him on earth hear the angels speak of him in heaven, and are satisfied.

It was a coincidence that on the following morning, I found, in a Scotch magazine, three verses by his Aunt Christine. In the present stressful time of war and death, they cannot be inappropriate, and at

AFTER MANY YEARS

any rate, they must have been among the last dominant thoughts of my heroine. We may easily imagine her, sitting at the open door of the large room which gave her such a wide outlook over the sea, and such a neighborly presence of the village, watching the ghost-like ships in the moonlight, and setting the simple lines either to the everlasting beat of noisy waves, or the still small voice of mighty tides circling majestically around the world:

WHEN THE TIDE GOES OUT,

Full white moon upon a waste of ocean,
High full tide upon the sandy shore,
In the fisher's cot without a motion,
Waiteth he that never shall sail more.
Waiteth he, and one sad comrade sighing,
Speaking lowly, says, "Without a doubt
He will rest soon. Some One calls the dying,
When the tide goes out."

Some One calls the tide, when in its flowing,
It hath touched the limits of its bound;
Some great Voice, and all the billows knowing
What omnipotence is in that sound,
Hasten back to ocean, none delaying
For man's profit, pleasuring or doubt,
Backward to their source, not one wave straying,
And the tide is out.

Some One calls the soul o'er life's dark ocean,
When its tide breaks high upon the land,

CHRISTINE

And it listens with such glad emotion,
As the "called" alone can understand.
Listens, hastens, to its source of being,
Leaves the sands of Time without a doubt;
While we sadly wait, as yet but seeing
That the tide is out.

This was my last message from Christine. For a few years she had sent me a paper or magazine containing a poem or story she thought I would like. Then Sarah Lochrigg sent me a Glasgow paper, with a sorrowful notice of her death in it, declaring that "it could hardly be called death. She just stepped from this life, into the next." Sarah, in a later letter, added she had been busy in her house all morning and as cheerful and interested about the coming spring cleaning as if she was only twenty years old. About fifteen minutes before twelve she said, "Now, I am tired. I will rest awhile," and she drew her father's large chair before the open door. The sea and the boats were spread out before her and the village lay at her feet. She could see the men fishing and the women going about the streets.

"The tide is well in," she said to her maid, "it will be high tide at three minutes before noon. Call me in about half an hour."

So she was left alone and I do not doubt it was then she heard that unfathomable call, that voice from some distant world far off yet near, and that her soul instantly answered it. She did not leave this

AFTER MANY YEARS

world worn out with pain and sickness. She went without hesitation, without fear, without seeking any human help.

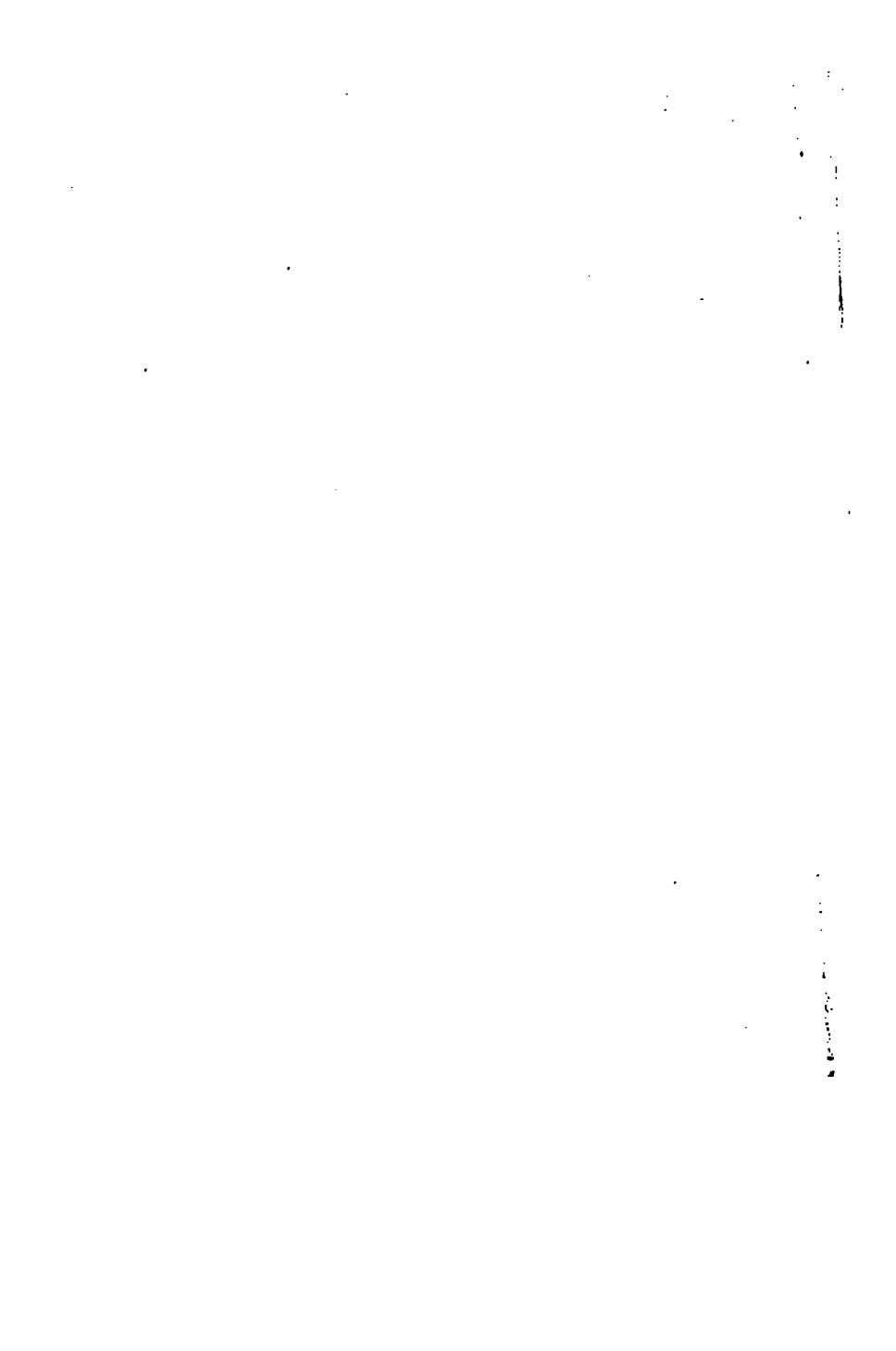
And I tell myself that she doubtless went out with the full tide and that some convoy of the Sea Angels was with her, for His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known. She died no death to mourn, for "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!"

(1)

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and the addresses are listed below each name. The list includes the names of the members of the committee, the names of the members of the sub-committee, and the names of the members of the advisory committee. The addresses are listed in the same order as the names.



1

—

